

Reprieve

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THE TESTAMENT OF JOHN RESKO

With a Foreword by
Carl Carmer



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DEDICATION

To my wife Anita, to my friend Carl Carmer
and to the thousands of people who helped me
toward the open gate.

JOHN RESKO

NOTE

The people in this book are real people, most of them having committed crimes against you and all of them having, one way or another, paid for those crimes. Except for the few to whom it will not matter I have endowed the rest with aliases to protect them from unpleasantness at their jobs, in their homes, and among their fellow men.

FOREWORD

On a summer morning in 1911 I met John Resko in the Art School room of Clinton Prison at Dannemora, a small mountain town near the Canadian border. I was there because the late Sam A. Lewisohn, a member of the State Prison Commission and one of my close friends, had asked me to accompany him on his annual inspection pilgrimage to this northernmost and unhappiest of New York's correctional institutions. Known as "Siberia" to habitual criminals, it had received at that time so many inmates from this very group that the average age of its population was approximately thirty-seven, though the average age of all inmates of the state's prisons was in the early twenties.

It was hard for me to realize that Resko, a bright-eyed, enthusiastic teacher, had himself been convicted of a major crime and sentenced to reside among the two to three thousand inmates "for the rest of his natural life." He talked so eagerly and at the same time so objectively about the therapeutic value of his course to those enrolled in it that he seemed more the intelligent and thoughtful penologist than the "lifer" whose sentence to live in a cell within the high gray walls could be ended only by death.

Sam Lewisohn and I made annual summer visits to Clinton Prison for seven years after my introduction to it. I do not know exactly when I came to the conclusion that John Resko was a completely rehabilitated inmate, but I believe that the realization came during my third visit.

The campaign to obtain Resko's release on parole was long and characterized time and again by heartbreaking frustrations.

Through all of its seven years Number 22818 remained, as far as I could see, the most contained and most confident of its participants. I can remember Sam Lewisohn's shaking his head from side to side and saying again and again, "I don't see how the boy keeps his spirit." Though Sam was sympathetic toward the idea of this prisoner's parole, he felt, and quite rightly, that, as a member of the Prison Commission, he was committed to working for the interests of the prison administration and the prison population as a whole and that he could not becomingly enter into a matter involving only one inmate.

Many of those state officials who opposed the effort to bring John Resko back to a society that might profit by his gifts were, I am sure, well meaning. None, I believe, was unalterably hostile to the concept that a man convicted of murder might so rehabilitate himself in prison as to deserve release on parole.

The story of John Resko's adapting himself to the world he found outside the prison after his nineteen years of incarceration remains to be told and I hope that he will soon tell it. Readers of this book will be glad to know I am sure, that, though at certain times movingly pathetic, it was at others hilariously funny, and as a whole truly happy. The years 22818 spent in educating himself in the prison have proved rewarding. Since his release he has illustrated many books, sold several paintings, made considerable and valuable collections of African primitive sculpture and Japanese prints. He has married a charming, witty, and cultured girl, former violinist with several symphony orchestras, and their apartment is a meeting place for many who are distinguished in the arts.

As for this book itself, it is my sincere belief that this is at once the most realistic and the most tenderly understanding of all studies of American prison life. Moreover it arouses in me, as it must in all its readers, the unhappy consciousness that behind the walls of our prisons (the most intolerable environment that man creates for his fellows) live many John Reskos.

CARL CARMER.

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DEATH HOUSE

ONE

ARCHITECTURALLY, THE DEATH HOUSE AT SING SING IS SIMPLE, symmetrical, and inoffensive to the discriminating eye. The East and West wings form two sides of a quadrangle which is completed by a larger building containing the half dozen last-minute cells, execution chamber, and morgue. A passageway connects the two wings to the "Dance Hall" with its last-minute cells where the condemned spend their final day.

The walled-in area between the wings and the functional part of the Death House is used as a recreation yard for condemned men. Fitted into leftover space where East and West wings join are a receiving office, kitchen, heavily barred visiting cages, and three cells for condemned women which double as quarters for the occasional psycho uncovered in the men's wings.

The system used in the management of the Death House is as simple and direct as its architecture. A man is checked into the place. He is executed. His remains are checked out.

Architecture, appointments, system concern the condemned only in their immediate effect upon him. The first and sustained impression is of cleanliness, order, and appalling efficiency. There is an undercurrent of terror about it all — perhaps because during those first moments of his admission a man begins to sense the deadly earnestness lurking behind the pronouncement, "I sentence you to die in the electric chair at Sing Sing Prison on . . ."

That is how I felt. I was scared numb. I was stripped and every stitch I wore on the journey to the Death House was tied into a neat bundle. The unsmiling guard asked whether I wanted my belongings sent home or to the Salvation Army. There was a feeling

of finality about that part of my life which had been governed by clothing.

The guard ordered me to precede him and then stand to one side while he unlocked the barred gate leading into the East Wing. In the Death House an inmate never walks beside or behind a guard.

After a quick, supervised shower I was given underwear, a white shirt made of coarse flannel, black pants, regulation socks, and a pair of black, all-felt slippers. Later, when I asked why no belt had been issued, the guard patiently explained, "We don't want no suicides in here. The Law says you gotta go to the chair and it's our duty to see that the Law is followed to the T. There's nobody beating the State in here. Not if we can help it!"

No belts. No laces. No matches. No writing tools. Nothing that might be in any way utilized by the perverse condemned to beat the State.

Cigarettes were permitted in our cells but we could get lights for them only from the guard on duty. This involved rattling one of the double locks — a padlock — against the cell door, for attention.

The clattering of padlocks is the most familiar and constant sound in the Death House. It is the temper gauge of the individual and the group. It is plea and it is protest, its metallic staccato sounds the urgency of fear and the insistence of hatred. The guards are masters at interpreting every nuance of every rattle. A wrong hack — a guard who is disliked and distrusted — is kept running by a demanding din that never lets up until his daily eight-hour stretch is over. Cigarettes must be rekindled, letters written, commissary items ordered, messages sent, questions asked until he is ready to collapse with fatigue. And all this with a smile, a polite request, a pleasant observation. All the malice is in the rattling.

Harry Lipshitz was the most persistent lock-rattler in the Death House.

Harry was a rarity — the first convict to be tried, convicted, and sentenced to death for killing a stool pigeon *in prison*! Harry hated cops, district attorneys, judges, rats, stool pigeons, squealers, prison officials, and guards of every category. His fate created great indignation and greater uneasiness inside the walls — what was the world coming to anyway?

Harry was the first con who spoke to me in the Death House. The padlock on my cell had just been snapped shut when a sharp

voice from the far end of the silent wing called, "Hey, Number 6!"
Number 6. That was *me*.

"Yes?"

"Whatta ya in for?"

Big joke. The silent wing broke down and I joined in the laugh.

"Ya got smokes?"

"No. They took everything away from me."

"Okay. I'll send some down."

While he talked a lock began slamming violently. The guard who had locked me in hurried by and in a few seconds was back with a pack of cigarettes.

"Hey, Number 6! Ya want somethin ta read? Papers? Magazines?" It was Harry again, slamming the padlock on his cell and yelling above its noise.

Being a martyr-hero in the cause of rightness, Harry's last days were made easier by an abundant flow of newspapers, magazines, books, cigarettes, candy, fruit sent to him by friends and admirers serving time in Sing Sing. Each newspaper, each magazine, each book was passed to every man in the East Wing regardless of whether the guy was right or not.

Harry's time in the Death House was dedicated to making life miserable for the guards. Harry had a system. Every day he would work out a different route for the reading matter he passed along. The routes were calculated in such a manner that the guard would be kept frantic running back and forth with newspapers from Harry to every other man in the wing. Harry's lock began banging as soon as he finished reading the papers himself and by the time the guard had finished passing newspapers Harry's lock would be summoning him to start the magazines on their devious journeyings.

It was a game Harry enjoyed and played seriously until the day he was escorted out of the wing on his way to eternity.

On his final morning Harry stopped by my cell, surrounded by the Death Watch, and asked, "Didja get all the papers an stuff last night?"

I nodded.

He offered me a steady hand in farewell, then, before turning away, he winked. "I'm still screwin 'em, kid!"

TWO

EACH WING CONTAINED TWELVE CELLS. ROOMY CELLS — LARGE enough to take four steps forward and four steps back. For some reason the East Wing cells were painted a faded buff while the West Wing cells were done in an equally faded gray.

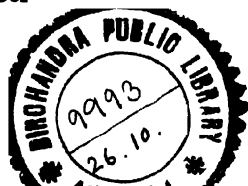
Accommodations consisted of a white enameled bed, a wooden chair, a table writing-desk bolted to the wall, porcelain toilet, porcelain washbowl, and one roll of toilet paper. Cell walls and ceiling were bare of electric lights or fixtures — no one was going to beat the State by electrocuting himself.

Spotlights hung outside, aimed into each cell. They were turned on every evening at sundown and remained lit until sunrise. Rules and regulations said the beds must be placed parallel to the bars and that no man would be permitted to cover his head while sleeping.

The place was full of precautions. Showers were allowed every day during recreation period but only when the guard was present. Recreation time varied according to the number of men awaiting electrocution. The hours from breakfast to lunch and from lunch to supper were fairly divided into exercise periods for the condemned men. Recreation was supervised by a special guard assigned to that task. It was his duty to watch us as we walked thoughtfully along the walled boundaries of the yard, or, if we felt like physical exercise, take us on for a fast game of handball.

If a shower was decided upon, special guards were called in. This detail kept an alert, probing eye on you while you lathered and rinsed under the spray.

Same with haircuts and shaves. A convict barber



to minister to the Death House's tonsorial needs. He would show up every Wednesday and Saturday, dragging along a small, portable barber's chair.

Vic the barber always set his chair in the exact center of the wing, between cells 5 and 6. We were ushered out of our cells one at a time and while Vic wielded a safety razor the Death House guard passed the lathered shaving brush to the man in the next cell. The man in the chair would be surrounded by two or three hacks — in spite of the safety razor. When haircuts were in order and scissors had to be used, the place swarmed with blue uniforms.

Most of the equipment in the Death House was portable and constructed out of lightweight wood on the theory that it would not be lethal if any of us should decide to use it as an impromptu weapon: the officer's flimsy desk and chairs, the cafeteria wagon, the barber's chair, even the altar — though that was made of good, solid planks. After all, who would dream of using an altar or any part of it as a weapon?

Yet the precautions were not always effective. Beating the State was a definite possibility that we discussed at much length and in great detail. At night, after the radio was shut off and only an occasional padlock rattled in the silence, the old-timers, the knowing ones, would tell of the guy who, during his last night, under the sharp eyes of the Death Watch, chewed through the veins of both wrists and quietly bled to death. Another had strangled himself with his own hands. Another had willed himself to die — willed himself to stop breathing, his heart to give up its desperate attempts to keep him alive for the chair. Beating the chair was a theme that occupied all of us all of the time.

I watched Ray, on his way to the recreation yard, suddenly sprint head down, full speed into a brick wall. He woke up in a psycho cell with a headache and a special detail to keep vigilant watch over him every minute of every day until he was jolted out of existence. At least Ray tried.

I think all of us envied the man with courage enough to make a genuine attempt to beat the State. I did. I believe every man who checks off the days, knowing that an appointed one will be his last, flirts with the notion of destroying himself.

Most men, however, find it easier to dream of escape, of an unexpected discovery of a legal technicality that will free them, of a

holocaust, a disease, an earthquake. Something. Something that will wipe out all of mankind with the sole exception of himself.

Best of all is to imagine that for no reason, with no effort, you discover in yourself the power to become invisible at will and a sort of secondary ability to walk blandly through concrete walls and steel doors. You can spend hours in peaceful fantasy, pacing your cell, relishing the thousand and one situations that grow out of one another.

Better yet, you can imagine yourself already outside and this gorgeous dame who turns out to be a fabulously wealthy movie star falls madly in love with you. . . .

THREE

LIFE IN THE DEATH HOUSE ADDED UP TO AN EFFORTLESS, SOPORIFIC routine. Letters and visits from friends and family had the bizarre effect of making the whole business seem normal and even pleasant — as though it would go on and on and on. *Your* day became a mental note — always there but, like all pigeonholed business, not given the unswerving attention it demanded.

Things kept happening. The Wop in 12 passed a newspaper to the guy next door. Number 11 grabbed the Wop's arm and, by diligently applying the required pressure, broke the ulna and radius.

After that the Wop ceased making slurring remarks about 11's predilection for throttling girl friends.

The quiet Puerto Rican in 9 who had done a thorough knife job on his sweetheart and her second-string boy friend, and who had never received a visit or letter in all the time he was in the Death House, quietly went to the chair. He did not shake hands with any of us. His farewell was a gentle, apologetic smile.

My neighbor in 7, Two-gun Crowley, caught a starling which had the poor judgment to alight in the Death House recreation yard. The bird was saved from slow destruction only because the rest of us urged Crowley to train it. In a few days he taught it to perch on his shoulder and keep off any flies that might come near while Two-gun applied himself to the art work in picture comic books.

For pure recreation, Crowley collected all the ants he could find in the yard, storing them in a small matchbox. Then he'd catch a fly, tear off one wing and all the legs on one side, and throw the buzzing insect to his ants. He spent countless hours watching des-

perately struggling flies being devoured piecemeal by the busy, hungry ants.

Crowley's partner, Fats Durringer, asked to be transferred to the West Wing. Fats was unable to work up an appreciation for the drawings I made for Crowley and which Crowley sent on to him. It is true the sketches were uninspired and monotonous, but then, they were not intended to be anything but graphic illustrations of Death House humor. Each drawing was pretty much the same as the one preceding it. All contained the identical elements—a rigid coffin out of which portruded a profile and, farther down, the sharp arc of a bean-belly. Clusters of roses and massive candles dripping wax contributed to the decorative mood. To narrow the margin for interpretive error, D-U-R-I-N-G-E-R was printed in capitals across the coffin.

Old Tom in Number 4 blew his top. He refused food, recreation, and visits. He asked only to be left unbothered in his cell where he had become involved in a discussion with Jesus Christ. For several days and nights the rest of us tried, with all the ribald arguments we could muster, to get the best of Jesus — but there was no helping old Tom. A detail of guards took Number 4 out of his cell one morning, still arguing but passive about being transferred to the Hospital for the Criminally Insane.

Nights, after the radio was turned off, Pee Wee, an old-timer, a fourth offender who had never learned, would tell about Dago Frank, Gyp the Blood, Whitey, and Lefty Louie. He'd tell how the first man sentenced to die in the newfangled electric chair got a commute because the workmen setting it up knew so little about their job that the chair was not ready for use when execution day came up.

Pee Wee was the quietest man in the East Wing — until ten-thirty in the evening when the radio loudspeaker was silenced for the night. Then his shrill, angry voice would fill the wing. "What the hell you guys eatin' your hearts out for? At least you know when you're going! If you were outside this minute you might be gettin' hit by a truck or slippin' on a banana peel an' breakin' your sconces. Cheer up! Before you know it all your troubles'll be over. . . ."

He had a great store of trivial information which he mistook for vital knowledge. "It's a funny thing about justice," Pee Wee

would scream into the quiet wing, "there is such a thing an it works! Did you guys know that the first to be electrocuted were a couple of square-johns? So help me, I can prove it! Supposed to be electricians. They were settin up the original electric chair for business an they knew so little about the thing that they popped themselves off. It's a fact!"

Pee Wee said he knew all about Willie Kemmler, the first murderer to die in the electric chair. Just before the switch was thrown, Willie cried to the warden, "I hope to God you guys are doing this right!" According to Pee Wee, "They fried poor Willie for five minutes and the stink of his bein burnt was so bad the witnesses were passing out. After Willie was unstrapped, he began gasping for air." Willie had to be killed again, Pee said with such certainty that we were easily convinced that the final killing was done in the autopsy room. His story of Willie's end is still a part of the folklore of prison population.

Occasionally Texas Jim felt compelled to talk about the actions, effects, and time relationships of toxic substances which might be expected to produce what Jim gently called permanent sleep. He favored cyanide because "You can trust it." Jim spent most of his time in the Death House collecting newspaper and magazine pictures of women. These, after clever and patient erasures, he transformed into erotic representations of the famous, near-famous, and infamous ladies of the day. For relaxation the big guy from Texas wrote notes containing observations like, "Suppose all the concrete ceilings in here began falling down this minute?" or, "Imagine the Chink cook putting rat poison in our stew tonight — we'd have nothing to worry about!"

He was right. Just the same, none of us looked forward to Jim's notes.

Evenings when the radio noises and the rattling locks gave us enough privacy to talk without being overheard. Crowley and I agreed that the Death House was not escapeproof. We agreed to prove it. Our scheme was simple. So simple it might have worked, at least to the point of getting us out of the Death House. Getting out of Sing Sing was a problem we ignored. Escape from the Death House was the main objective; the rest, we felt, would be easy.

We needed a weapon and made one by uncoiling the wire in our

bedsprings and wrapping it around tightly rolled newspaper. It made a bulky but effective club. It took days of patient, watchful work. Our cells were supposed to be searched every time we went out for recreation, bath, or visit but the idea of escape from the Death House was so farfetched that the search routine, except on rare occasions, had long been abandoned.

Luck was with us, our cells were not frisked. We had a club. We had a plan — flexible enough with ifs and maybes to be instantly revised. We had the determination and each other's moral support. A day was selected and even the moment when Crowley would step out of his cell, knock out the guard, grab the keys, open my cell, and away we'd go.

We convinced ourselves beyond the smallest doubt that our escape was going to be the perfect one. And, convinced, we were as elated as though the thing was already accomplished. In our elation we generously offered freedom to several friends in the East Wing.

We never discovered the "who" or "how" or "why" of the betrayal of our plan. On the morning of the day we had selected to make our try for freedom the East Wing was invaded by guards and Principal Keeper Sheehy himself frisked Crowley's cell where he found our homemade club.

Crowley and I were separated. Two-gun was isolated in one of the last-minute cells and I was shifted to the West Wing. I didn't like the West Wing. I didn't like the gray cells. I didn't like the guards, I didn't like the radio, I didn't like the food. I made a nuisance of myself. I tried to set fire to my bedding and I stuffed the toilet bowl with underwear and flushed it until the wing was flooded.

I was moved into a cell next to Crowley. For one week all privileges including that of bed and mattress were withdrawn. Writing, receiving newspapers, magazines, and visits were denied us. I spent the time pacing my cell and cursing the bad break that had spoiled what I still thought was a sure-pop escape. Crowley sensibly forgot about the escape, devoting the hours to unraveling his socks and constructing out of the string a model of the proposed George Washington Bridge.

By the time our privileges were restored Crowley had his bridge completed, one end firmly anchored to the bars at the front of

his cell and the other, suggestively, tied to the hinges of the steel side door leading into the execution chamber.

Routine in the Dance Hall was as monotonous as in the wings. We had no radio but could hear the East and West Wing speakers, muffled and sounding better. On those Thursdays when executions were held, the Death House radio was turned off in deference to the solemnity of the occasion. We always knew beforehand when someone was going off. Early on the morning of execution day a procession of guards, the Death Watch, would escort the condemned into the Dance Hall, locking him into one of the cells with a side door opening into the short "last mile."

During his last day a man was allowed to have visits until nine or nine-thirty in the evening. Except for the brief moments when they were taken out for visits or brought back, Crowley and I saw little of the men who went off. There was no time for talk. As soon as the final visits were over, the priest or minister or rabbi would begin the ritual for the dead. In the wings someone would begin singing,

"Smile the while
We bid you sad good-by,
For tonight
At eleven o'clock
You die . . ."

Others would pick up the melancholy tune until our farewell drowned out the foreboding chant at the altar.

At five minutes to eleven a guard would unlock and step into the condemned man's cell. He carried a pair of scissors with which to cut the trouser legs. The inmate waiting for the ultimate experience as a living creature was co-operative — he would stretch out his leg and his smile to the guard proclaimed his courage as a man. The priest waited by the cell gate while the pants were expertly cut so they would not be in the way when the electrodes were clamped to the leg. Maybe he thought the whole business an abomination. Maybe he remembered that the next day was Friday and wondered what kind of fish to have for dinner. He fingered the large brass crucifix nervously and stepped into the cell at a signal from the guard.

The warden is supposed to officiate at every execution, but except in cases involving notorious killers, he delegates the authority to the principal keeper.

The P.K.'s arrival is timed. At one minute to eleven he strides into the Dance Hall and every guard stands at rigid attention. The priest and the condemned man take their place behind the principal keeper. The guards, solemn and military, line up behind them. It's crazy. It's done without rehearsal, and everyone knows exactly what to do.

They follow the P.K. through the little green door.

The wings are quiet and even the most unbelieving keep their eyes on the spotlights pointing into their cells — waiting for the bulbs to dim when the chair goes into action.

Even Crowley is quiet. He has accepted the idea of death in the electric chair for himself, and about midnight he will be noisy and tough about it. Now he paces his cell silently.

Always, before we could anticipate him, the P.K. would come back through the little green door. Sometimes he would be carrying the specially designed electrode for shaven heads and a black cloth mask. He'd hurry out of the Dance Hall.

It would be over.

And the lights would not have dimmed.

Duringer, the tremendously powerful, barrel-shaped man who was Crowley's partner, was brought into the Dance Hall early one morning. We shook hands wordlessly all around. Past hurts, past meannesses, past hatreds were forgotten, forgiven. There was nothing left. Nothing to say. Duringer was locked into a cell and almost immediately taken out again for a shave and final haircut.

Fats Duringer ordered steak and onions, french fries, apple pie, and ice cream for his last supper. We shared the food with him and Crowley tried to liven things with a few jokes, but they were too feeble and we were too low.

Duringer did not want to die. He fought the thought of death all day and his steps faltered through the little green door.

Just before Christmas I did a sketch of the warden's daughter, Cherry. The drawing earned me a dinner of stuffed goose and everything that goes with it. Two-gun and I had a high time, eating and listening to "Silent Night, Holy Night" coming in over the loud-speakers in the wings.

Then Christmas was over and New Year's was over. Crowley and I were kept isolated in the Dance Hall, getting fat and casual about the prospect of going off in the chair. We played checkers every day on a board placed between our cells. A New York tabloid thought it newsworthy enough to publish bulletins on the progress of the games that would end in the deaths of both players.

Two-gun Crowley's turn was next.

Like his partner, he ordered steak and onions, french fries, apple pie, and ice cream for his last supper. We ate the meal only because the food was there. Crowley's foster mother made the painful journey to the Death House that afternoon and left early after giving freely, as it was her nature to do, of love and courage to the wayward, mixed-up waif who had failed her. About eighty-three that evening Two-gun was called out for another, a surprise visit. This was a short one and when he was brought back to his cell Crowley's face was red with tears.

He told me about it while the Death Mass was being said. His mother, his natural mother, the woman who had never spoken or written to or seen him since the day he was born and deposited on the steps of a foundling home, had come to visit her son on the last day of his life.

"Yeah, she came ta see me alright! She came ta see me for one thing only — ta get me ta sign my union insurance over ta her!"

Tough Two-gun Crowley was not going to break again. He screamed, startling the priest and the Death Watch:

"Sonofabitch!"

At the last moment, with only seconds left, Crowley remembered he still had a quart of ice cream. He insisted on splitting it with me. We convinced the guards that if they heated the quart we would have time enough to dispose of it. A guard was sent into the kitchen. He returned with a limp carton full of multicolored goo. . . . Two-gun and I each drank half.

We shook hands.

Crowley stepped beside the priest, grinned, and walked bravely through the little green door.

FOUR

CROWLEY IS DEAD AND THE WORLD CHEERS IN UNEASY TRIUMPH. Crowley is dead, unmourned, rotting cell by cell in an unconsecrated grave. Law, the mechanical ingenuity of man, and the defensive imperatives of our social system have done their duty.

Crowley is dead — the marvelously delicate synchronization of his vital organs effectively destroyed by a man-made bolt of electricity.

Crowley is dead. He rots and the only offense he can now commit is in the stench he gives off.

I feel that Crowley, because he was conceived and forced out of the comfort of his mother's womb, has earned at least a passing thought. He is dead now, this infinitesimal menace to humanity, this single virus in a culture breeding viruses beyond calculation.

Nothing was accomplished by the act of bringing Crowley into this world and I wonder how much more was achieved by the snuffing out of his life. As Francis Two-gun Crowley, bastard, teenage killer, he has become an obituary notice in the newspapers, another dead-file dossier.

That's precisely the point. Newspaper items and dossiers are not people.

A Crowley is not created in the fleeting heat of copulation just as a Crowley is not eliminated by a few lines of type. There is something about Crowley that reaches beyond the act of birth, beyond waking and sleep, beyond eating, drinking, vomiting, and all the other functional acts by which life is prolonged.

Crowley is deathless, indestructible. Send thousands of volts through him thousands of times and he becomes tougher, slier,

more determined to avoid his execution. He prowls the garbage-littered jungles of our cities and stalks the roaring concrete of our countryside. He lurks at midnight in every dimmed hallway, in every black lane. He walks behind you and he waits in your path ahead. He is your friend and your brother, your father and your son.

Crowley is your baby and you cannot kill him unless you first kill yourself.

Crowley is dead and I am moved back to the West Wing. All my privileges are restored and my cigarette bill has tripled. I think I have figured out the cataclysmic "why" that has brought me to the Death House.

FIVE

UNEXPECTEDLY IT WAS AUGUST 16TH OR DECEMBER 20TH OR March 7th and my day was only hours away. The guards were quicker in responding to my padlock's demands. My neighbors were increasingly solicitous. Did I have enough cigarettes? Did I get all the newspapers? Would I like a piece of chocolate cake? A veal cutlet sandwich?

Visits became more frequent. From my seat in the tight-fitting visiting cage, the members of my family were vague, hazily illuminated forms. I drew on remembrance for features and expressions. I became sharply aware that my share of time was almost gone.

Soon it would be the last day for me.

Except on rare and special occasions Thursday is execution day. The hour is 11 P.M.

The Death Watch goes on duty late Wednesday afternoon. From then on, for the rest of his life, the condemned man is under constant observation. Sometime during Wednesday evening a guard appears with pen and pencil. You know his errand and you order something very ordinary like steak or chicken and a piece of pie, better yet, strawberry shortcake — might just as well make the last supper a fancy one. All the trimmings, boys, and to hell with the expense!

Sleep, during the last night, has little attraction. You go through the motions of washing and each tooth is carefully, personally, lovingly scrubbed. You think of the millions of people who would give anything to have teeth like yours and a melancholy burns your guts because in twenty-four hours these fine, healthy teeth will

be on their way six feet under with the rest of you. The bed is made but you smooth out every wrinkle and arrange the blankets just so. It's the last, safe, hiding place but the reality of tomorrow destroys all fantasy, all hope. At eleven o'clock your mind becomes pellucidly clear, a vacuum, an infinity of nothingness.

Twelve hours from eleven to eleven and twelve more from eleven to eleven. Simple arithmetic. In exactly twenty-four hours from this moment I would be full of fear, bracing myself for the terrifying charge of electricity. . . .

It is only after a fierce, hopeless struggle that the inevitability of the situation is accepted. Let's get it over with. People die — even young people. Younger than I. Babies. At least I enjoyed living for a while — I'm that much ahead. Look at all the diseases that kill how many people. A guy can be crossing the street and get hit by a car or slip on a banana peel. Or he can fall down a flight of stairs. Then there are bombs and ptomaine, tsetse flies and rattlers and drowning. There's lightning . . . It's the same thing — one jolt and it's all over. They say this is the easiest, the most humane — Jesus Christ!

There are other ways of being executed besides electrocution. You can be hanged or gassed or shot and each way is said to be the easiest — take your pick.

And what happens after? Could it be there is a heaven and a hell? Could it be . . . ?

Finally you fall asleep for a few hours. It does not matter whether your slumber is peaceful or not. You are overcome by an unaccustomed excitement and anticipation — like the first time you went to bed with a woman. Everything is keyed up. The guards are pleasant and the breakfast is good. The sunlight is bright and promising — even the wing looks restful and cozy. Christ!

The guys are all right. Even the bastards. They shake hands with you, smile sadly, and say, "Take it easy, kid. . . ." You know they feel badly about you and you determine to show them that you can take it. You grin and you hold your head high so the jelly in your neck doesn't show. You stop at each cell and perform like a brave, fearless man.

Your mind is off on its own. It is saying to you:

"This is the last time you'll see 12.

"This is the last time you'll see 11.

"This is the last time you'll see 10.

"This is the last time you'll see 9.

"This is the last time you'll see the five bars on the window in front of your cell.

"This is the last time you'll see the guards' beat-up desk.

"This is the last time you'll see the shower, and this is the last time you'll see the West Wing.

"This is the last time . . ."

You know it must be near eleven when the guard swings open the West Wing gate. Regulations say that a condemned man must be in the last-minute cells by 11 A.M. The passageway is lit by mournful yellow bulbs leading the way like the shuttle lights at Grand Central Station. You are boxed in by guards and the walk seems longer than it really is. You follow the final path of Lefty Louie, Dago Frank, Gyp the Blood, Tough Tony, Ruth Snyder, Judd Gray, and hundreds of others long dead, long buried, long forgotten. Were they as frightened walking this same concrete floor? You wonder. . . .

You *know* they carried Durringer in — a big powerful slob like that! — and you had heard about the ones who fainted, fought, screamed, kicked, pleaded, and prayed. Lot of good it did them. They're all dead. At least you'll try to go like a man. Don't let anyone see the fear chewing away at your testicles.

The Dance Hall is a familiar place. Like home. There's the cell in which you were isolated after the escape that never got started. There's the bed and the toilet and the washbowl and the half roll of toilet paper that has not been used since you were moved. There's the radiator you cursed for being so noisy and the brick walls and the barred windows. The noon light is cold, different. The place seems empty though you and the Death Watch are in it. It's very quiet. No one speaks and footsteps are soundless.

You are locked in one of the cells with the double doors and almost before you can look around one of the guards is motioning for you to come out again.

Vic appears with his chair. He cuts your hair silently, quickly. You feel the clippers high on your head. It's a close one all right—practically a baldy in back. The front is trimmed lightly. Vic turns on the shower to wet his shaving brush. He tilts your head

back and works the lather gently around your chin and under your nose. His fingers say, "I know, kid, I know." You keep your eyes shut against the tears.

A last shave includes lotion for which you are infinitely grateful — the shock of its sting helps you control yourself. You sit up and the back of your head tingles, waiting for the lather and the scrape of the razor. You've heard about the head being shaven so often and now . . . But it doesn't happen. You are surprised and relieved — maybe this is an omen.

It's not. It dawns on you that a close-cropped patch large enough to accommodate the electrode is all that is necessary.

Slowly Vic puts away his equipment. He puffs deeply on a cigarette, taking his time, keeping you company. Finally he slaps you on the can and whispers, "Hold it up, kid!" then he's gone, dragging his chair after him.

Under the shower you soap and rinse and soap and rinse your head over and over. They have done something shameful to you — to your head. They've taken away your manhood. They've humiliated you in your own eyes. You feel miserable and you hate them.

Them?

Vic? The Death Watch? Warden? Judge? D.A.? There is no time to consider two billion people individually. You get into fresh clothing that is handed you and walk back to your cell.

Lunch is good. Pork chops, mashed potatoes, peas, coffee, and cake. You clean it up and top it off with a satisfying smoke. It must be about twelve-thirty.

Death House visits are from nine to twelve in the morning and from one to four in the afternoon. Every day. Thursdays, the about-to-be-executed man is permitted to see family and friends for an additional few hours — from six to nine in the evening.

They come in. Mom, my two older sisters, my wife. Mary, my youngest sister, was not brought along — she's too young. Pop won't be in until later — he's coming straight from work.

Because she thinks it might disturb the solemnity of the occasion, Mom stifles her usual complaint about not being able to see me clearly. We sit, looking toward each other. My sisters begin to weep and soon Mom and Jo join them. I know they feel terrible

about breaking down. I know they feel the tears will upset me. I want to cry myself and I do inside. I keep repeating, "Please, Mom, please, Jo, please . . ."

Mom controls herself enough to tell me, "The lawyer left for Albany last night. It cost two hundred dollars for his expenses. . . ." I boil. Two hundred dollars! A fortune . . . Mom keeps on hopefully, "He has an appointment with the governor and somebody else." The "somebody else" is emphasized, but I know there can be no "somebody else" for me. Not for a lousy two hundred dollars.

We talk little and only to ease the weight of silence that bears down on us. The minutes are endless and the hours fly. Without being prepared for it, the afternoon is over and I am brought back to the Dance Hall.

In my cell I rap on the door leading into the execution chamber. It's solid steel and my knuckles ache. The clatter of the food wagon being trundled into the East Wing distracts me. Feeding time. My last supper.

The meal looks good and I divide it into four portions, three of which I send to my pals. I eat my share slowly, unconsciously, because I'm worried crazy about my family. I keep thinking that, being strangers in Ossining, they won't know where to go for a meal. Crazy, but there it is. Besides, how must they feel with everyone looking at them, knowing they are here on a death visit?

Another worry comes. Are they supposed to meet Pop in town? At some agreed-upon place? Will he know how to find it? Crazier and crazier, but for a while I forget the last-minute cells and the few hours left.

I finish washing for the fourth or fifth time when the visit-room guard calls me. Pop is with Mom and the rest of them. He nods to me. He hasn't spoken to me since the night of my arrest when he quietly said I had done a horrible thing. He visited me regularly; he brought me cigarettes, he left money. Mom told me he was constantly calling on lawyers and friends who might offer some hope for me. But whenever he came to see me he would sit silently, looking at me. No anger, no recrimination — only a great sadness. Mom says he cries in his sleep.

The last visit is a harrowing one. We all think of the same thing and no one wants to, or can put it into words. The women cry silently.

At nine o'clock the guard watching us nods meaningfully. The visit is over. Mom and the girls burst into loud cries. For this last time I am allowed to kiss my loved ones through the bars. My father supports Mom, whispering courage to her. I kiss each one and I feel like a quintuple Judas.

In the passageway I can hear Mom's desperate, "Johnny! Johnny!"

The Dance Hall seems brighter. Your imagination immediately conjures a scene of tremendous activity in the prison powerhouse: thick cables being plugged in, switches thrown, dynamos speeded up, and a torrent of deadly juice being poured into the Death House in preparation for the evening's ritual.

One of the Death Watch asks if you would like some coffee. You nod and figure him for a swell guy. He comes into your cell with the steaming drink and two other guards follow him. They are polite and insist that you sit while the legs of your trousers are slit.

Alone once more, you stride back and forth watching your flapping pants legs. Everything calculated — no allowance for error. The slit just so many inches up the leg, exactly enough to receive the electrode. The hair cut just short enough for another electrode to press against the scalp. A thought takes form: there should be a couple of extra electrodes for the wrists — just in case. Seems logical. You wonder whether to roll up your cuffs now.

You stop pacing long enough to ask the time. Nine-thirty. Christ! Only an hour and a half left! Ninety minutes. Five thousand four hundred seconds. Maybe a few seconds more or less. Sounds like a lot. How long is a second? You imagine a fight, one of the guys is down and the referee is crouched over him, counting. You adjust your steps to the swing of the referee's arm. Five-paces-to-the-back-of-the-cell — five-paces-to-the-front-of-the-cell-and it's an official knockout! You feel you've counted too quickly. Try it again. Try it again? What the hell is this, a game? Is this the way to use the quick-dying seconds? It is almost ten o'clock and there are only three thousand six hundred left.

A lone padlock chatters in one of the wings. Someone is dying for a smoke. No, not dying. He wants a smoke, he craves a smoke, he's impatient for a smoke. You are the one who's dying.

It's quiet over there. You know all the guys are pacing their cells, thinking deep, worrisome thoughts, keeping you company. At

eleven they will stop their pointless pacing, their futile thinking. Each man will rivet his eyes to the spotlight in front of his cell, waiting for the signal, waiting for the bulb to dim, waiting for the visual proof that all this is real. It never happens and you know it, but the fable stays alive. There must be a direct cable from the powerhouse to the chair. It would be comforting to know that the lights dimmed even for a split second, for long enough to prove something about which you are unsure.

Three thousand six hundred seconds. Holy Jesus! Even while you think about it it's less.

You don't notice the altar being rolled in but there it is against the wall opposite your cell. Father McCaffrey is standing by the gate saying something you don't hear because your eyes are on the Death Watch. A moment ago they had been standing in a loose group, talking, smoking, then suddenly there is no more talk and the cigarettes are thrown away, stamped out. They remove their stiff-visored hats and assume mournful attitudes, their hands clasped, their heads bowed. One of them walks to the altar, genuflects, and after striking a match on the sole of his shoe reverently lights the two candles.

For you! Understand? For you!

These guys standing so sorrowfully, praying for you, asking the Almighty to forgive you your sins, participating in a solemn high mass, are the same guys who are going to march you to your death in less than an hour. Get it?

The Reverend Father J. J. McCaffrey, priest of the Holy Roman Catholic Church, sky pilot, prison buck, right guy, continues spieling. "My son," he says, "we are all of us sinners. It is not for us to question the ways of the Lord.

"There comes a time to each of us when we must meet death face to face.

"Death comes to us as a friend.

"We must all prepare to meet our Maker.

"Confess your sins and beg our Lord God's forgiveness.

"He is the Most Understanding.

"He is the Most Lenient."

Baloney.

Why did He select *me* as His instrument for the taking of an-

other's life? Why did He make me His fall guy? Why did He chart the course of my life to run straight into the Death House? Why? Why?

And what about the other guy? The dead man. The dead innocent man whom I killed because he resisted my attempt to rob him. What about *him*? Why was *he* selected to be the victim? What about his family? His wife? His children and brothers and sisters? Why were they picked by Him to grieve, to feel the hurt I let loose when I fired that deadly bullet?

Why?

You look at the black-robed man talking to you, asking you to toss away the final shred of independence, of dignity. He's a man — no more and no less. He grieves for you. He loathes the role in which he finds himself. He chokes on the words he is compelled to say to you. So you say to him, "Look, Father, take it easy . . ."

What you say or what you think means nothing to the good father. He turns away and walks to his black-draped altar.

In one of the wings someone starts singing,

"Smile the while
We bid you sad good-bye,"

another guy picks up the tune, and you feel a massive cry twist and squirm and tear at your guts. You curse blindly, bitterly. You curse man and you curse God. You curse the cops and judges. You curse yourself and the man you killed. You curse your mother and you curse your father.

Your blasphemy is silenced by the ringing telephone. The Death Watch guard who answers it looks toward you with a relieved grin.

You've got a last-minute reprieve.

Just like in the movies.

And only twelve hundred seconds to go. . . .

SIX

THIRTY DAYS LATER, TO THE MINUTE, I REPEATED THE PRE-EXECUTION ritual. This time the reprieve arrived earlier — before I had had my second last supper.

My third last supper was identical with the preceding two. During the final visit I listened to Mom's words of hope out of habit. They had no meaning except that they reflected her desire to keep me alive.

She told me of the many little things that were being used to save my life:

I had never missed a day in school and my marks were always above average.

My father was an honest, hard-working man.

My mother was an honest, hard-working woman.

My sisters were good, decent girls.

I had won a medal in a poster contest.

I had won medals for the 100-yard dash and the 880-yard relay.

I had been awarded a medal for playing the violin.

I had played concerts and coached and taught violin when I was twelve.

She saw in me only the image of her own goodness, of her own dreams, of her own aspirations. She refused to see a man bleeding to death from a gunshot wound inflicted by her Johnny. She could not see the tears or hear the cries of his loved ones. She would not believe that her son was capable of robbery.

She spoke of medals and violin playing and drawing as though these things would move the men who had it in their power to spare my life. And while she was speaking of these things, my lawyer —

the man who had been appointed to defend me because I could not afford to hire counsel — was making a powerful plea in my behalf. He pointed out to the governor that:

Every member of the trial jury believed, and stated for the record, that I was the victim of a tragic circumstance and that the death penalty was too harsh.

The trial judge felt the same way.

The district attorney agreed with everyone else.

By the time my last visit was over, by the time the last good-bys had been said, the governor had been persuaded that death was an excessive penalty to impose on me.

In my cell, waiting for the short walk through the little green door, I was told that my death sentence had been commuted to life imprisonment.

For the first time in my life, I fainted.

I came to in the West Wing and was told that I would be transferred to the prison hospital in the morning.

SING SING

ONE

I HAD MY FIRST LOOK AT SING SING PRISON AFTER I HAD LIVED IN it for two years. The morning I was taken out of the Death House I discovered that the outside of that unhappy building was bordered by flowers. The contrast between the gloomy, greenless interior and the bright color circling the outside was so sharp that I felt free in spite of the principal keeper's reminder that I was to spend the rest of my life on the wrong side of the gray walls.

Sing Sing was a huge place. Forty acres locked in by high walls. There were new buildings and old buildings and buildings on the way up. There were enormous red brick cell blocks punctured by thirty-foot-high barred windows. There were knit shops, tailor shops, and mess hall. There was a Recreation Building and a modern, all-concrete Administration Building. There was a hospital and a monumental rock pile where the cons served their time making small ones out of big ones. There were two large recreation yards for baseball, football, handball, or just a place where the convicts had to be during certain hours of the day.

There was the State Shop where clothing was issued to the inmates. It was my first stop after leaving the Death House. I was just another con and had to wear the regulation, unfittable uniform.

A friend, dating back to county jail days, worked in the State Shop. He congratulated me, asked whether I needed cigarettes or reading material. He introduced me to the con working with him.

"My friend Johnny. Just got outta the Death House."

"How ya doin?"

"Fine, fine."

"At's the way, kid! Need any butts or anythin?"

"No. No, I'm all set." I felt good.

The guard escorting me was a red-skinned, red-haired man who chewed tobacco. He leaned against the counter grinning, his jaws working over the tobacco while my friends ribbed him.

"Some racket ya got, Jim! Good pay, vacation, no work. That's what I shoulda done instead a breakin into people's houses!"

"Yeah, and don't forget the hospital care an grub an a buck here an there. Boy!"

The guard nodded and grinned some more.

My county jail friend turned to me. "Jim's all right. Best hack inna joint. Do ya a favor any time! Right, Jim?"

Jim nodded again. He was my first connection in prison.

In the Administration Building, Jim pointed his club to the Bertillon Room. A somber, suspended man rephotographed, refinger-printed, and remeasured me from head to foot. He searched out every scar, mole, birthmark, and tattoo, describing each, in detail, on a large official form.

After the examination he said, "Ya betta memorize ya number." He handed me a square of paper and a pencil. "Ya betta write it down. Aight. Foe. Fahve. Fahve. Oh. Got it?"

I got it. For the rest of my stay in Sing Sing I was 84550.

In the hospital clinic Jim left me with a brief "Be seen ya." Doc took over, ordering me to open my mouth, shut my eyes, jump up and down, bend over, say, "Ah!" My blood was tested and my reflexes were tested. I was weighed, my height was registered, and my teeth were examined. Doc shook his head sadly — nothing wrong with 84550.

A con nurse took me up to the convalescent ward, pointing to a bed, told me it was mine, and left.

A lanky, burnt-sienna Negro looked up from an old copy of *Film Fun*.

"You the boy from the Lectric House?"

I nodded.

"Welcome home, boy! Ah'm Copperhaid. Dat Mista DeLacey."

A huge man who looked like a toad sitting in a wheel chair nodded.

"Dat Mista Small."

A redhead in the bed opposite mine smiled.

"Greetings! And felicitations upon your good fortune! You shall find it infinitely pleasanter here than in the condemned cells. You have my assurances."

There were eight men in the ward. Copperhead introduced me around. They knew all about me. Noodles Kaplan offered a cream cheese and lox sandwich.

"Go head! A little snick ain't gonna hurt ya. Besides, we're pract'ly family, ya know. My old lady got friendly wit your old lady —onna train comin up here. We're from the Bronx. Hunnert Seventy-four an Longfellow. Sure!"

It was like meeting a third cousin. I ate the sandwich while we talked about the neighborhood.

TWO

MY BED IS NEAR A WINDOW THROUGH WHICH I LOOK OUT OVER THE prison shops and walls. Out over the Tappan Zee sparkling against the black Palisades. The excursion boat to Albany interrupts the nights' darkness by playing a searchlight over the buildings and guard towers squatting on the immovable walls. If the breeze is right, shreds of music float over the water, over the walls and cell blocks, and we feel homesick and sad for ourselves.

Copperhead sighs, "Man, dis is what Ah deserves fo bein a good fella. Fifteen t'thuddy yeahs. Fifteen t'thuddy long, mizzable yeahs — jus because Ah don't burn down the mammy-jammer what puts the rope aroun mah neck. Man, Ah shoulda knowed, it don't pay t'be good!"

The Albany boat's mournful farewell to Sing Sing leaves Copperhead feeling sorrier and sorrier for having been a good fellow.

In the evening when Georgie Small feels well enough, he regales us with stories of amatory experiences enjoyed in all parts of the world.

"Besides being the most versatile and adept in their profession, the demimondaines of Saigon are indubitably the most hygienic-minded ladies on the whole of this terrestrial sphere."

Bingo Barry nods in confirmation, grinning cynically.

"An absolute tonsorial essential is the shaving of the mons veneris, followed by a ritualistic laving, rouging, and the subtle application of oestrus-provoking scents — precisely gauged to stimulate one's salivary glands."

Mr. DeLacey's eyes pop, making him look more than ever like a toad disguised as a broker-swindler.

The romanticized, beautified, and beatified Parisian *filles de joie*, Roman *putanas*, British tarts, and plain American whores about whom Georgie speaks so authoritatively fill a great need in our womanless lives.

Copperhead, not understanding a word beyond two syllables, strains his steaming imagination so effectively that he spends most of the nights groaning between ecstasy and the pain of an unhealed appendectomy incision.

The rest of us watch, think it funny, and wait expectantly for the lanky Negro to split his gut. We hold back our own reactions to Georgie's stories, giving way only when we think we are safe from each other's curious eyes.

We are either dirty-mouthed or mealy-mouthed. When we are not bragging about the girls we've had, we milk each other for sympathy because of the bum breaks we are getting.

We eat three meals a day, sleep ten hours every night, and waste fourteen hours playing dominoes, checkers, cards, exchanging lies and dirty stories, hating the world and feeling sorry for ourselves.

We gripe about the food, the radio, the guards, the orderlies, the doctors, and each other.

I think the deadening monotony, the bickering, the boredom are peculiar to the convalescent ward. I speak about it to Georgie Small — the old-timer who should know.

"Ennui!" he tells me. "Ennui and incarceration are synonymous. Our mentors, precariously balanced upon the diametrically opposed concepts of punishment and rehabilitation, are incapable of resolving the situation into a workable pattern. Punishment and rehabilitation! One negates the other and any action in one direction provokes violent reaction from the other. Result? Stalemate in all penological echelons. Nothing is done and we do nothing. Since we are individuals who perform primarily by action, a cessation of such action ineluctably stultifies, distorts, demeans, dehumanizes even the strongest of us."

Noodles, listening in, shakes his head in bewilderment. He explains it in his own way. "Buddy, all I know is in this goddam place the only thing ya kin do is blow ya 'pp!"

Mr. DeLacey grunts, swinging his wheel chair around. "Would anyone be interested in a fast game of mahjong? It's the least obnoxious way of going crazy. . . ."

Breakfast at eight. Then you sit around and wait for twelve. Dinner at twelve. Then you sit around and wait for five. Supper at five. Then you sit around and wait for ten. Lights out at ten. Then you crawl into bed and wait for eight to start the round over again.

Every day.

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, holidays, birthdays, anniversaries.

Every day.

Rain, shine, snow, sleet, hot, cold.

And every day as long as your sentence.

Needling Copperhead about his fifteen to thirty years, playing casino or dominoes with Noodles, watching the doctor ram steel pins into Georgie's paralyzed legs makes no difference. Each day is just as long a wait as the day before and the day to come.

The endless waiting is not only in the convalescent ward. It's in the cell blocks and the shops. It's not only in Sing Sing. It's in every prison in the state, in every prison in the nation, in every prison in the world.

I think the thirty days in the hospital will never pass. I become fretful, impatient. I begin to understand that this can go on forever. There will be no escape unless I bring it about myself.

THREE

FROM THE WINDOW NEXT TO MY BED I CAN SEE THE ADMINISTRATION Building, joined to and forming part of the wall surrounding me. The bars on the last window rise to within five feet of the top of the wall and I'm convinced that if I can make my way to that window all my troubles will be over. I dismiss the guard post straddling the wall one hundred feet away as unimportant — I'm certain the guard will be looking in another direction when I climb the bars, make the leap for the top of the wall, and drop to the ground on the other side, free.

I talk to Bingo Barry about it because he looks, acts, and talks tough. In the toilet where we can talk without being overheard, I tell him about my plan for going over the wall. When I finish, he nods.

He says it's a good idea. He says he's going with me. He says he will get a hacksaw blade for us to cut ourselves out of the hospital. He says he has friends right in Ossining who will hide us until the heat is off us.

What he does not say is that he wants his sentence cut, that he would do anything to get out on parole and anything means telling the authorities that I am planning a beat.

My luck is good because Bingo spills everything before we get started. The night sergeant who gets the story has Barry transferred to the protection ward.

I get frisked, my bed and bedstand get frisked, the convalescent ward gets frisked, and all the time I'm saying to myself, "Thank Christ the bastard never got that hacksaw!"

Next evening, my twenty-second in the convalescent ward, the guard on the night shift handed me a letterhead.

The return address was Box B, Dannemora, New York.

FOUR

AN IMPATIENT GUARD AWAKENED ME AT FOUR-THIRTY THE FOLLOWING morning. I dressed, washed, and packed a toothbrush, toothpaste, comb, shaving outfit, and a few handkerchiefs into a pillowcase.

I was ready.

Sing Sing at night was no different from Sing Sing in the daylight. Buildings, yards, walls, walks, and paths were brightly spotlighted by powerful searchlights. I followed the guard along the shadowless road to the Administration Building.

Convicts, singly and in groups of two and three, with fat pillowcases slung over their shoulders, were being herded into the main hall. There were fifty of us.

We were given one egg sandwich each and told we could have all the coffee we cared to drink.

It was a silent breakfast. The guards, knowing we were worried and apprehensive, hurried us along with a friendly "Okay, fellas, don't stall too long. We gotta get moving. . . ."

Breakfast over, we were ordered to lay out our belongings for inspection and search — what was legitimate in Sing Sing might be contraband in Dannemora.

We found ourselves without books, watches, ties, razors, razor blades, and earphones.

Not allowed to read? Not allowed to shave? No radio? Christ! Dannemora, by hearsay, was a tough prison. The frisk made us feel it might be tougher than all the stories about it.

Cloth bags for packing our remaining possessions were handed

out. Our prison numbers were checked off against our names. We were lined up, counted, and ordered to pair off.

A short guy stepped up beside me. Because of the oversized uniform he wore, it was hard to tell whether the rest of him was as thin as his face. His right eyelid was twitching.

From where we stood in the uneven line we could see a massive guard straddling a pyramid of handcuffs. He pointed to the first two cons in line and said in a tenor voice:

"Okay, step up here!"

He reached down for a pair of handcuffs and had the two chained to each other before they knew what was happening.

Left hand of the man on the right. Crrrk!

Right hand of the man on the left. Crrrk!

"Okay. Next!"

Crrrk! Crrrk!

"Okay. Next!"

Crrrk! Crrrk!

"Okay. Next!"

My partner and I stepped forward, tugging at our coat sleeves to bare our wrists.

"Okay. Next!"

We were shuttled along to the end of the hall where another guard knelt beside another pile of chains.

"All right, you guys, step up!"

We were chained once more — ankle to ankle.

"Line up over there!"

Our leg chains scraped awkwardly across the concrete floor.

The detail assigned to take us to Dannemora consisted of half a dozen guards dressed in their Sunday best. They checked our chains, counted us off, and officially took over from the uniformed guards. They did not carry clubs, but their jackets bulged over hip or shoulder pistols.

We stumbled out of the Administration Building, our leg chains tripping us, cutting viciously into our ankles. We marched raggedly through a tunnel opening upon a small platform — Sing Sing's private station on the New York Central tracks.

The breakfast, the frisking, the chaining, had taken about one hour. Our train was not due for ten or fifteen minutes and the guards gave us the go-ahead signal to smoke. They had locked the

barred door at the entrance to the platform and divided themselves into two groups, stationing themselves at each end of the station.

The double line of convicts broke but did not mix. The few old-timers clustered together, smoking, cutting up old scores, giving the feel that this was a routine affair for them. The rest of us tried to appear as much at ease.

I asked my partner what he was in for.

"Car. . . ."

"Ever been in before?"

"No. . . ."

"They say it's a ten-hour ride to Dannemora."

"Yeah, that's what I heard. . . ."

"Where is the place anyway?"

"Up near Plattsburg. . . ."

I knew that much myself. The guy was hinky on talking and I figured him for a shrewd apple or an out-and-out chump.

A train went hurrying by, bound for New York City. One of the old-timers yelled after it, "It won't be long before I catch you, you sonofabitch!" Somebody else laughed.

Cautiously, our train poked its yellow headlight through the tunnel. The guards waved us back against the wall — just in case someone might decide to finish his sentence before reaching Dannemora.

It came in slowly, easing to a smooth stop. A special car, a day coach, had been hooked on for us. This was for real. We flipped our cigarettes, lined up for another count after which a couple of short-tempered guards shoved, hauled, and cursed us aboard, two by two.

We were on our way.

FIVE

I THOUGHT: I'M ON A TRAIN. A PUBLIC CONVEYANCE. PEOPLE get on and people get off. The only difference between me and people is that I'm chained hand and foot to another guy and I'm not allowed to get off. There are three men at the front of the car and three men at the rear and each one has a gun and orders to prevent me from getting off. . . .

Without moving my hand, I examine the steel cuff. It's clamped tightly around my wrist. It's a trap and its true meaning is in the eleven seamless links binding it to its twin around my partner's wrist.

This is no handcuff for a cops and robbers game. This is no handcuff for a magician's routine. This is a handcuff to guarantee that I will be delivered to Dannemora.

The handcuffs, the leg chains, and the guards with their guns convince me that I am going to remain in this seat in this day coach until I'm told to get off and that will be in a small town in the mountains far up the river.

Well, that was that.

The train nosed its way along the banks of the Hudson. Through the car windows everything appeared gray — the river, the trees, the sunlight, the occasional house, the indifferent farmer driving a gray tractor. The landscape was as dull as the coach full of gray men whispering and thinking gray thoughts.

Albany was gray when our train pulled in — its station and its people as dismal as the city. Our car was uncoupled and left waiting for another train to drag it up near the Canadian border.

A squad of Albany policemen came aboard with our lunch. Containers of funky gray coffee, shriveled sandwiches of gray ham and cheese. Even the Sing Sing guards refused to free-load on the leftovers.

A con complained about the food. Then another and another. We were feeling mean and irritable. We beefed about the coffee, the sandwiches, the leg chains, the handcuffs. The guards took our abuse, then pointed out that they weren't responsible, that they agreed with us.

You can't fight with anyone who's on your side — even if it is the Law. We quieted down, cursing into our coffee and sandwiches.

After a long wait a train finally took us in tow. Silently we made the journey up the Hudson Valley, past Lake George, to the lower tip of Lake Champlain and into the city of Plattsburg. The closer we came to Dannemora, the less inclination we had for anything but our own thoughts.

In Plattsburg we were again shunted off — like garbage being passed along distastefully to the dumping grounds. We were willing to wait, to stay in the day coach indefinitely — but a cranky, indifferent old locomotive hooked on and in a few minutes was wheezing and twisting into the mountains.

Twenty miles to Dannemora. Upgrade all the way. Past Peru station and six milk cans gleaming grayly in the afternoon sun. Past a white frame building bearing a sign with the name Cadyville printed in black letters against a white background! Straining all the way.

Compared to Peru and Cadyville, Dannemora is a big town, full of houses, paved streets, and stores with electric signs.

The ferret-faced guard called out, "Okay, fellas! This is it. . . ."

DANNEMORA

ONE

"C'MON, GODDAMIT! GIT A MOVE ON!"

The guards who came aboard to relieve the Sing Sing detail were big and tough. They looked mean, they acted mean, they talked mean, and they swung long, mean, metal-tipped clubs. We kept our eyes away from theirs. They wore mackinaws, windbreakers, odd jackets. Most of them wore whipcord and corduroy trousers tucked into hunting boots. None of them were friendly or even neutral.

"C'mon! Git the lead outa your can! Git movin!"

Two mud-coated dump trucks were parked against the station platform. We were herded over to them and ordered to climb in.

"C'mon, goddamit. Hurry it up! Hurry it up!"

We piled in with our bundles, our partners, and our chains. Guards climbed up on the tail gates, on the cabs, on the running boards. We took off on the home stretch of our journey. The village of Dannemora is uphill — streets, houses, telegraph poles. The trucks grunted in low gear all the way.

One edge of Main Street was held in line by a high, dirty wall of gray stone. Along the top, at fifty-foot intervals, stood guards armed with machine guns and rifles. A heavy wood-iron gate, painted the color of dried blood, covered the single break in the wall — an opening just high enough and wide enough to allow us to pass through.

The trucks were waved in and we rolled slowly up a road which ended at the West Hall. The tail gate dropped and we scrambled out. We were lined up, counted again, and marched through a barred gate into the cell block. It was dim and cool inside. A few cons lounged on the galleries, grinning, looking us over.

A detail of about twenty guards filed into the hall. They walked up and down the line, examining us, glaring, putting the fear into us. We were lined up against a yellow wall.

"All right, empty your bundles!"

We put our possessions out for inspection, helping each other as much as we could. The first fully uniformed officer showed up while the guards sorted through our belongings. He carried a handful of official-looking papers and waited, apart from the others, until the searching was over. He gave the order for our chains to be taken off.

"When I call out your name and number I want you to step forward. One step."

He began reading from the papers he had brought with him. As each man was called forward he was told his new number and cell location. This was repeated once.

"84550. John Resko . . ."

I stepped out.

"New number, 22818. You'll lock in the South Hall, 25 gallery, cell 24."

I nodded.

"22818. South Hall, 25-24."

I took my place in a newly formed line, repeating over and over, "25-24. That's easy. 22818. Twenty-two eight eighteen. Twenty-two thousand eight hundred eighteen. 22818."

As though my life depended on remembering 22818.

When the distribution of numbers was over we were given an official homily which was to serve as a marker for our future conduct in Dannemora.

"Your company officer will pair you off according to your height. You are to keep the place he designates in line unless he decides to change it. Keep your uniforms buttoned. Every button. Wear your hats at all times except in shops, mess-hall, and chapel. In Dannemora you march. Learn to keep in step and no talking in line! You may smoke in your cells, in the recreation yard, and in the shop yards after meals. Anyone caught smoking at any other time will be locked up and lose from ten to thirty days' good time.

"No one is permitted to leave his gallery, hall, shop, or wherever he might be unless a guard accompanies him.

"We've done away with the silence system. You may now talk

out of your cells until seven-thirty. After that any man caught talking will be locked up.

"All cell lights must be turned off at ten. All inmates must be undressed and in bed when the ten o'clock count is made.

"The morning bell rings at six-thirty. Get out of bed, clean up, fix your bed, and police your cell. When you hear the officer making the count on your gallery, stand in front of your cell gate . . ."

A short, round guard waddled up and stood to one side and behind the speaker. He looked like Santa Claus stripped of beard, red uniform, and smile. His thick white eyebrows were permanently joined in a scowl above an angry red nose. We were told that the little fat man was our company officer and that if we had any questions he would answer them.

The cons on the tier draped themselves comfortably over the railing.

"How many tough bastards I got here?" Fatso wanted to know. "C'mon, speak up! There's nuthin I like better than tough guys. Any a you thinks he's a better man than me, talk up right now!" The steel point of his club included the whole line.

"Anybody tries to pull a fast one on me will be the sorriest sonofabitch ever lived. I give orders around here an I want them obeyed! Understand? The only tough guy around here is me!" The club swished back and forth, underlining every word.

"When I hit once, like this" — the metal bounced against the slate floor — "that means 'Halt!' Get it?"

We got it.

"When I hit twice, like this"—two sharp raps—"that means 'Forward!' Get that?"

We got that.

"Awright! Now, line up, button up, and shut up!"

No one had any questions. We kept our eyes straight ahead and remained very, very silent. A couple of us hurriedly buttoned our jackets.

TWO

TWO CRACKLING RAPS STARTED US MARCHING TO THE OTHER END of the West Hall. Our arms and legs swung light and free. We marched through a connecting doorway leading into the South Hall, turned right, and, soon as the club sounded, came to a halt.

Fatso pointed his club to the top tier. "That's 25 company. Get up there, find your cells, get into them, and no talking!"

Narrow flights of steps zigzagged upward from tier to tier. Four flights. Twenty-five gallery, like all the others, was circled by a wood walk hardly wider than the steps leading to it. Slim iron pipes screwed into stanchions along the outer edge of the walk served as railings. The whole thing felt flimsy, insecure, and we walked along it carefully, hugging the wall.

Cell gates were recessed and each had a number stenciled on its lock, just above the keyhole.

21. 22. 23. 24.

This was mine.

The gate swung open easily and I stepped into darkness. I struck a match and found a small bulb screwed into a socket hanging from a twisted wire on the back wall. It worked. Its light showed dirty, dark green walls and ceiling. It showed a narrow, rusty iron bed with sagging, rusty springs. Folded and piled in the center of the bed were a stained mattress, a stained pillow, a gray ragged blanket, a pillowcase, and a bed sheet. On the floor against the back wall were two burned-out cigarette butts and a cast-iron slop bucket. Someone had generously and thoughtfully left a wad of neatly torn squares of newspaper next to the bucket.

Five feet eight inches. That was me in socks. I reached upward

and the palms of my hands pressed against the ceiling. I spread my arms out and the palms of my hands pressed against opposite walls.

This was home for the rest of my life.

Three and a half paces forward. Three and a half paces back. Three steps, half step, turn. Three steps, half step, turn. Stone walls, iron bars, and sick-green paint. A rusty bed, a stinking mattress, and an encrusted bucket.

Home!

Fatso's voice shouted along the gallery. "Everybody out! Everybody out!" He stood near the steps, counting us as we filed by. His club snapped against the railing, urging us to hurry.

We lined up, remembering the places we had been given. One of the guys said hopefully, "Maybe they're letting us out to the yard."

"Naw. Maybe it's the hospital."

"Maybe we're gonna get mugged again."

"Maybe it's the State Shop."

Maybe, maybe, maybe. What the hell difference did it make where we were being taken? We had to go whether we liked it or not.

Fatso came down the steps, his nose swollen with fury. "I told you bastards there's no talkin in line!" He screamed, "Anyone don't like the idea, step out now!" His club challenged each one of us. "This is the last time I'll tell you. No talking in line!"

Each man pretended to himself that Fatso was calling all the others bastards. Not him. Each man kept his eyes ready on the neck of the man in front of him.

"You! You!" The club picked two cons out of the line. "Get up to the front of the line. The resta you follow them. An keep in step!"

Fatso led the way and the rest of us followed, in step, behind the new leaders. We marched back through the West Hall, which seemed cleaner and cheerier than when we had first entered it. We passed two guards picking up our chains and we passed several staring, unsmiling cons standing in the doorways to their cells.

We kept in step under an arch and into the large rotunda which was the hub of the prison. The East Hall, the West Hall, the hospital, tubercular ward, mess hall, guardroom, visiting room, chapel and auditorium radiated from this central hall.

It was like Times Square — stand in the rotunda thirty minutes any morning, noon, or evening and you'll see every con and every guard in Dannemora pass by.

The club brought us to a halt in front of double doors. "When you get into the mess hall, march down the center aisle," Fatso ordered. "Pick up your eating gear at the counter. And no talking!"

We marched into a huge, dusty, brown-gray room filled with two sections of long, rigidly spaced tables. Through the barred windows lining the sides rays of light filtered weakly. At the far end of the room were two prison-made counters from which food was dished out to inmates.

Fatso stationed himself between the counters, behind a solid table piled high, poker-chip style, with gray, dented aluminum plates and bowls. "Each guy takes one plate. You guys turn left and get your food there." He pointed to the counter at the left. "You guys turn right and get your food at that counter. March up the end aisle to the last table. Keep in line, keep in step, and take your seats as they come."

A tired-looking con wearing a dirty white apron stood behind a pan heaped with limp slices of gray bologna. He tossed two slices into my plate and I moved on. Another con plopped three slices of bread on top of the bologna.

I followed the guy in front of me to the last table on the left side of the mess hall. All the tables were narrow, made of oak, and each long enough for fifteen men to sit at, shoulder to shoulder. Each table was set with fifteen aluminum cups, fifteen knives, and fifteen spoons. We sat on stools.

The cups were three-quarters full of unsweetened tea which was handy for washing down the bread. The bologna was too much for most of us.

Talking or turning around in the mess hall was strictly forbidden and when a man finished eating he was to sit with his arms crossed over his chest. Five minutes were allowed for supper.

THREE

WE MARCHED BACK TO OUR CELLS AND WERE LOCKED IN FOR THE night. I couldn't face the walls and the bed, the sick light and the sickening bucket. I leaned on my cell gate — eight round bars so closely spaced I couldn't grip them; five flat horizontal bars for reinforcement; thirty-eight steel rivets for additional strength.

Cautiously I tested the gate, exerting more and more pressure. It wouldn't budge. I pressed my back against it, digging my heels into the floor and straining with all my might. It wouldn't budge, it wouldn't offer the smallest hope. And the cell walls offered less — what was the use of breaking into another cell with another gate? I forced myself to relax, to calm down. I remembered that I had a whole lifetime to plan. . . .

Someday! Someday!

Overhead a steam whistle blasted. Yard period was over. The steady swish of silent, marching men rippled monotonously across the rotunda, through the West Hall, into the South Hall as company after company of convicts kept step into the mess hall, out of the mess hall, into the East Hall, into the West Hall, into the South Hall.

Everything was done quietly. The companies marched up to their galleries, the men into their cells; the guards locked each gate, pulled the control levers — double-locking every man in his cell.

Fatso made the six o'clock count. He paused at every cell, curling a finger to check each man. Two full fists and he undid one button on the cardigan he wore. When all five buttons were undone, he had two curled fingers left over. The count was right on 25 gallery, each one of its fifty-two cells occupied.

The small sounds of men just locked into cells began to gather, to swell, to increase. They grew into noise as men called to each other, got into shouted conversations, screeching arguments. Curses, laughs, shrieks sounded out of the din and a crazy, clashing, smashing clattering of tin pails added to the sudden uproar. Someone yelled to the new fish — to us. Someone near me answered.

"Waddya in fa?"

"I got five ta ten. Who's that talkin?"

"I'm down here on twenny-one company. Where you guys from? Sing Sing?"

"Yeah. Hey! Lissen! Ya know Dominoes?"

"Stanley Dominoes? Christ, yeah! He's over inna East Hall. Woiks inna cotton shop."

"Hey! You guys! Stop the crappin till I get this pass made, willya?"

"Yeah, yeah. Sure. Okay. Jim. Jim! Hey! Cut out the goddam noise!"

"Christ. I know Dominoes from way back down on Tent Street! Ya know the Sunshine Poolroom?"

"Jesus! Can't you guys cut it out fa one secon? Jim! Jim!"

"Hey, Puggy! Hey, Puggy! Hey, Puggy!"

"Jim! Jim in twenny-two four!"

"Waddya want?"

"Hey, Puggy! How'd ya stinkin Giants do today?"

A runty, red-haired con, tilted to one side by the weight of a twenty-gallon pail, whined at me through the cell gate.

"Hey, bud! Ya wan any wadda?"

"What's that?"

"I said ya wan any wadda?" He spoke slowly, releasing the words gently so they would not disturb the cigarette stuck to his lower lip.

"Water? Yeah!" I looked around my cell. "What do I put it in?"

"Jeeeeehez! Ya meana tell me ya don't know alla ya stuff is unna ya bunk? Fa Chrissake!"

I felt under the bed hurriedly. A shallow tin basin and a tall aluminum cup, covered with dust, were in a corner. I blew the dust out of the cup and Red patiently explained that I might also have half a basin of water.

"Dat's fa ya ta wash in. Da cup ya hang on here, see?"

He pointed to a wire wound around two of the lower bars of the gate. An aluminum hook was riveted to the lip of the cup — it fitted easily over the wire.

After the gallery men had serviced their tiers with water they began making passes all over the prison. A gallery man working in a particular hall was not permitted to leave that hall but he could relay a pass to any gallery man working in another hall. Newspapers, magazines, notes, sandwiches, cigarettes, tobacco — anything that could be squeezed between the narrow bars — might be passed to friends, acquaintances, creditors, or enemies. The only requirement was that the item be tied or wrapped securely and that the receiver's gallery and cell numbers be clearly marked. Addressed, the article was wedged between the bars where the gallery man could see it, pick it up, and send it on its way.

It was a system. All the passes were first sorted, then tossed from gallery to gallery, from hall to hall until they reached their destination. No one searched or pried, and stealing a pass was in the same category as stealing the United States mail — a guy could get killed trying it.

During the periods when talking was allowed we made up for the hours of enforced silence. We never spoke out of our cells — we shouted; we never discussed — we argued and the loudest and fastest talker always won. The need to be heard, to express an opinion, to exchange ideas, was uncontrollable.

Even during the old days of the silent system convicts risked bread and water, the Hole, and broken heads because of an irresistible urge to talk. They learned how to speak out of the corner of the mouth without moving lips, forming almost indistinguishable words deep in their throats, thrusting sentences through clenched teeth. They learned the finger language of the mutes and in the evenings after being locked in their cells they communicated with one another by means of shadow signs, shadow symbols, projected on the walls outside their cells — like children making rabbits out of clenched fists and wriggling fingers.

Gallery men, out in the open and enjoying the advantage of

many direct contacts, made the most of the edge they had over the rest of us. They stomped up and down the tiers, calling, arguing, shouting, quarreling, commenting, having a great time.

"Hey, Peanuts! Pass this on ta Joey Dee, willya? An tellim his stinkin Jints stink! Why in hell din't they put Hubbell in today . . .?"

"Twenny-tree twenny-eight! Hey! Git up! Here's the paper for ya. From Bullets. There's a hellova good article on Roozevelt. . . ."

"Hey, Wingy, catch this! Give it ta Frank. . . ."

"Hey . . .!"

"Hey, Mac! Ryan wantsa know if ya wanna b'loney sandwich?"

"Louieeeee! Stop beatin ya pup! Here's a movie mag from Chap-pie. Wait'll ya get a loada Loretta Young. Jeeesis!"

"Hey, Chink!"

"Hey, Palumbo!"

"Hey!"

"Hey . . .!"

Loudspeakers, made in the prison tin shop, noisy as the trumpets of doom, were suspended from the ceilings at each end of the hall. Wired to a central radio which turned on after the six o'clock count, they poured out a constant gibberish ranging from moaning low to hysterical high.

As seven-thirty approached, the noise increased. Last-second messages were screamed. Final passes were rushed from cell to cell accompanied by frantic shouting, swearing, and pounding footsteps.

A bell shrilled twice and there was immediate silence — momentarily as disturbing as the noise. Somewhere, on a gallery under me, I heard a man trickling into his bucket. It was seven-thirty and any talking from now until morning was forbidden, punishable by loss of good time and isolation.

The tension which had been building up since I had been told I was on the Dannemora boat began to ease off. By the time the guard making the eight o'clock count flashed a light into my cell I was able to handle a single thought without going off on a crazy tangent.

The very first thing I had to accept was being here. In Danne-mora. In the South Hall. In cell 24 on 25 gallery.

In.

In for the rest of my life. Understood? Accepted? Yes? Then why all the excitement? What was the big deal? Was I the only one to whom this was happening? No. Was I the last to whom this would happen? Again, no. Well . . . Others had lived through it, some stronger, some weaker than John Resko. And if others could, then, by Jesus, John Resko could!

What did I have to dream for, to hope for — a lifetime in prison? A lifetime in a rathole like this? That was less than nothing. A pardon? I just got one from the electric chair. Buy my way out? Pop was working for thirty dollars a week and I did not have a penny of my own. A revolution? Maybe. Proving, somehow, that I should not be kept in prison? How? Cops and D.A.s and judges and governors needed a lot of convincing. Escape? That was more like it. More immediate. More to the point.

I stopped pacing to re-examine the gate which remained as immovable as a point of law. Even a good hacksaw would find it a major problem. Eight bars so close together that at least three would have to be cut away before even a slender guy like me could crawl through. Cutting three bars, if I could get a hacksaw, would take a long time. But let's say I did get a hacksaw and I did cut the bars and crawled through. Then what? I still had to get out of the hall, which was full of guards twenty-four hours a day. Let's go a step further. Let us say I could get by the guards and out of the hall. There was the high wall and there were the guard towers, searchlights, and more guards with machine guns and rifles. Fine. By a miracle I manage to get over the wall. Now where am I?

In Dannemora, a million miles from anywhere. A prison town and every prison guard and his parents and wife and sons and daughters itching for a reward. No, it was no good. There must be other ways. I would have to take it easy, give myself time to think, to look around, to plan.

Discouragement made my bladder ache. I forced myself to use the bucket, twisting my head as much as I could to avoid the stink.

I spent the next hour slowly unpacking the few belongings left over from the frisks. A nail, fitted into a too large hole between the bricks, turned out to be a handy hook for my towel and coat. Soap, comb, toothbrush, and toothpaste found a dusty place beside the washbasin under my bed. I had been smoking steadily since

being locked in and the bitter-end butts were scattered on the floor. I decided to clean up. I picked up each butt separately and dropped it into the bucket, lifting the lid just high enough for the stub to fall in. I swept the floor with the sides of my hands, corralling each grain of tobacco, each particle of dust, working the accumulated sweepings toward the door where I pinched up all I could and deposited it with the cigarette stubs. The tiny pile of fine dust that remained I blew out of sight under the gate.

At ten the big brass hall-bell rang noisily and before its sound died out the cell lights were doused. I undressed hurriedly, tossing my clothes into a corner on the floor. The loudspeakers were silenced and somewhere down the hall a guard's heavy footsteps told the count was being taken. Except for the soft thud of his slipped feet the hall was quiet as a mausoleum.

The footsteps climbed up to 25 gallery and passed steadily by the line of dark gates. Suddenly I was blinded by the glare of a searchlight searching through the bars of my cell. I was there. Everything was okay in 24 cell and the light went on. I lit a cigarette — the last for tonight, I swore — hoping it would knock me into a black sleep.

The cigarette was hardly half smoked when I began scratching. My shoulders itched and my belly and legs. I got out of bed fast, kicking the blanket off. I struck a match, searching over the sheet and pillows.

Nothing.

I lifted the pillow, uncovering two black bedbugs, fat with blood. The light annoyed them and they moved slowly, staggering like a couple of drunks. The match burned my fingers and I lit another. I didn't know what to do. Should I put my shoes on and grind them into a couple of smears? No. No one walks on bed sheets with his shoes on. Besides, I'd have to sleep on the ground-in carcasses and the skin on my back crawled at the thought. Tossing them into the bucket was another idea that wouldn't work — the poisonous fumes would kill them but the problem of doing the job without handling them was too much.

The match burned my fingers and I lit another. I had to do something about the bugs. I finally compromised by stripping the sheet off the bed and shaking it out over the floor. I slipped a bare foot into a shoe. I would squash them, mash them out of exist-

ence, crunch them into the stone floor. I was wild with fury, with disgust, with the need to rid myself of the vermin.

I found their brothers, sisters, parents, cousins, aunts, uncles, nephews, nieces, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, grandfathers, grandmothers, friends, and acquaintances. The cell was crawling with them. They were in the bed, in the bedsprings. They were on the floor, on the walls, on the ceiling. They were deployed in squads, in platoons, in companies, brigades, battalions, armies — poised for action. They were impatient to start the blood flowing, to rend, tear, pierce, gorge. I was trapped. My belly and legs were covered with red splotches where the advance guard had probed.

Every hour, while the count was being taken, I crawled under the blankets, pretending I was asleep until the keeper's light flashed by my cell. It meant new bites each hour but fear of being caught out of bed was greater than my fear of the bugs. I was in and out of bed all night and about three o'clock in the morning I ran out of the only protection I had — matches. The bugs preferred doing their bloody work in the dark and I had been fighting them off with wavering flames. I nursed the single book of matches carefully and, toward the end, had even split the cardboard sticks in order to double my reserve of ammunition. The dying flame of the last half match was used to ignite the cardboard cover and in a few minutes I was in the dark — without defense, without a smoke, without sleep.

I hated the world. I hated its Creator, its laws, its guardians. I hated all things animate and inanimate and especially hated the bedbugs because I did not have the guts to mash them into bloody spots.

FOUR

DAWN CAME SOMETIME BETWEEN THE FIVE AND SIX O'CLOCK count. The cell lights were turned on and the hungry bugs retreated into dark cracks, springs, corners, interstices. I felt an uneasy safety. I fixed my bed, washed and combed my hair, using as a mirror the remaining water in the drinking cup. I dressed, policed my cell once more, and stretched out on the bed, where I fell asleep almost immediately. The hall bell jarred me awake almost before I had closed my eyes. I was groggy and had no idea where I was until I realized I was scratching my neck. The bugs had waited until I was helpless in sleep. My neck and arms were like a sieve.

The noise of cells being opened all over the hall dared anybody to continue sleeping. A different guard unlocked our gates — a lanky guard who instructed each of us to stand outside our cells when he pulled the automatic brake that let the doors swing free.

The first thing I did when I got out on the gallery was to beg a match from the guy in the cell next to mine.

"Man! I been dying for a smoke all night. Didn't sleep a wink. . . ."

"Yeah. I heard you. What the hell you trying to do, get more time for arson?"

"No, the goddam bugs kept me up all night. The cell is loaded with them."

Another guy cut in.

"You too? Christ! The place is stacked with 'em. I been killin the bastards since we were locked in."

My neighbor was a tough baby. "I wouldn't let 'em throw me!"

he said. "I slept most of the night except when this guy" — meaning me — "started blowin his fuse."

We laughed because it was supposed to be a very funny remark.

We kept our voices low and, while we spoke, other companies, locking on the lower tiers, were lining up on the flats and marching off to the mess hall in silent, gray columns moving to the sharp commands of the guards' clubs.

From the front end of our gallery sounded the familiar two raps. We filed, no talking, past our new guard, who counted us as we went by. Down the narrow stairs and, like the rest of the old-timers, into our places in line — waiting for the club's go-ahead order.

We were the last company, in the mess hall, which seemed grimmer and gloomier in the clear morning light. The place was full of gray backs hunched over breakfast. Guards, spaced along the aisles, stood at attention, gripping their clubs, alert for any infraction of rules. A fight, a complaint about the food, and the mess hall could become a butcher shop in seconds.

Most of us new fish marching in for breakfast were conscious of the guards' tense hostility and the furtive side glances of the old-timers. We picked up our bowls and spoons and collected our ration of mush, one spoonful of sugar, a ladle of skimmed milk, and three slices of bread. Before the last man in our company was seated the first company in the mess hall was on its way out. None of us dared turn our heads but we heard the clubs and the sound of spoons dropped into a wooden box. Everything was timed to the exact second. We had hardly washed down the mush and bread with the cooled-off excuse for coffee when our guard rapped for us to "Get up" and "Forward march!"

A watchful guard stood behind the narrow box placed in the center of the mess hall's double doors. His eyes shifted left to right as we filed by, counting each spoon. I made a tossing motion before realizing I had forgotten to bring my spoon along. I got panicky, expecting at least a rap on the head, but the guard merely growled, "Go back an get it!" while his eyes kept swinging back and forth. I got it in a hurry and was back in line before the last man in my company passed by the spoon tally. I felt as though I had committed a cardinal sin until a gray-haired second offender on my gallery told me out of the side of his mouth, "Ya'll get used to it, kid. Evvabody does it soona or later. Only thing is watch yaself

— the hacks don't wan nobody sneakin the eatin tools outa the mess hall. They're ascarded ya'll make a shiv or a key outa them . . . ya gotta be real careful!"

Only a little patience is needed to convert a dull mess-hall knife into a deadly shiv and a key can easily be beaten out of a flattened spoon. In spite of all the griping we did about it, we understood the need for the guards to be certain that each and every knife and spoon was accounted for. We knew that knives in our possession meant not only danger to the keepers but an even greater danger to ourselves. Among us, shiv men were respected only because of their potential menace and the respect was generously spiced with fear. Shiv men, we knew from repeated experiences, were less likely to attack a guard than one of their fellow cons.

The new guard ordered us to pull our gates to, after we were in our cells. He pulled the automatic brake and there we were — not locked in, but unable to get out. Red, the gallery man, came down the tier, stopping at each cell to say apologetically, "The hack says fa me ta tell ya ya'll be going out wit the buckets ride away. . . ." A dead cigarette stuck to his lower lip, flopping up and down while he spoke.

Our company was marched into the old East Hall, through a narrow gate, and into a small stone shed, open at each end. Inside were three huge iron vats connected by a framework of pipes which poured a steady stream of water into each. The first vat, as we entered, was for emptying the buckets, the other two for rinsing. At the exit end of the shed stood a large battered oil drum, top removed and about half full of thin white liquid which gave off a faint smell of deodorant. Placed on a ledge above the drum was an equally battered mess-hall cup with which we measured out one portion of deodorant per bucket. There was a feeling of anxiety about the place — a need to get out as quickly as possible. The stench was an extension of the building and it stuck to clothing, hair, skin, and bones. The guards kept up a nervous chant: "Hurry it up! Hurry it up!"

It was worse during the winter. With heavy snowfalls, with the thermometer stuck at about zero, the water froze, the pipes burst, and the path from the East Hall to the bucket house became a solid sheet of ice discolored by spilled urine and excrement. Dur-

ing winter, discipline from the East Hall to the bucket house relaxed. The guards permitted us to break formation to make our way carefully along the ice, watching every step we took, watching the man in front and worried about the man behind. A fall was not funny — even to the onlookers. The iron bucket, flying out of a man's hand, became a dangerous comet with an ugly, fecal tail. Sprinkling the path with ashes only added to the hazards. Our footsteps quickly ground the cinders into the ice, which anchored them almost immediately, and a fall then was sure to draw blood or produce a broken bone.

We carried our buckets back to our cells. Cons who worked in the shops left their buckets out on the grass bordering the East Hall. The covers were left off for airing and all the buckets were lined up in company formation.

The bucket chore over, we were ordered to get down to the flats immediately and line up.

The eight o'clock shift had come on duty and our guard of yesterday was waiting for us. He was neither friendlier nor nastier and his club was just as authoritative as it had been the day before. He looked us over, found no fault with the way we were lined up, and got us into motion, leading the way.

We crossed the rotunda and in the corner where it joined the East Hall the club brought us to a halt. A couple of cons stuck their heads out of the hall. One of them called over, "Hey! Howda you guys like ya new home?" Our guard turned on them, snarling, "All right, ya bastids, get back where ya belong!" They disappeared.

To us he said, "You guys line up single file against that wall. An you kin smoke if ya wanta!" Jesus! That was the first human thing he had said since we had been turned over to him. Everyone relaxed and decided that he wasn't such a bad sonofabitch after all.

He leaned against the opposite wall, his eyes wandering up and down our line. He did not smoke. After a few minutes another guard came out of the East Hall. He spoke to our keeper and we were brought to attention. "Allright, ditch your butts!"

The new guard opened a door leading into a large room stocked with everything in the way of clothing and cell equipment that the State allowed its charges.

On racks built around two sides of the room were coats and pants woven, dyed, cut, and tailored in Dannemora's own shops;

winter and summer underwear, towels and bundles of socks knitted in Sing Sing; in large, crudely lettered bins on the floor were thousands of pairs of shoes manufactured in Auburn Prison. From Auburn, too, came the cell cups and washbasins. Great Meadows Prison contributed brooms and foxtail brushes. There were crates packed with long slabs of yellow soap. Boxes, again from Great Meadows Prison, contained wood-handled toothbrushes made exclusively for convicts' use. Metal-buckled galoshes and rubber ponchos for hall and shop runners and trusties were stacked in one corner of the room. On shelves running across one wall were reams of official letterheads, cartons of shoelaces, small containers of prison-manufactured tooth powder — a simple mixture of talc and pumice.

Shelves were packed with thousands of boxes of wood matches and thousands of paper-wrapped portions of tobacco leaf. We were called in one at a time and the line moved slowly. When my turn came I was told to toss my Sing Sing peak cap into a crate near the door. The Dannemora hat, a gray pillbox with visor, felt strange and awkward on my head. I followed the State Shop guard around the room, giving him my various sizes. Out of the bins and off the shelves he handed me a gray shirt, a pair of gray cotton pants, an undershirt and drawers, one pair of gray-speckled socks and one pair of heavy, shapeless shoes. Out of the boxes I got one slice of yellow soap, a small square of toweling, toothbrush and tooth powder, a large box of matches, and a twist of State tobacco.

We marched back to our cells and were given just enough time to store our new belongings before being ordered down to the flats again, lined up, and started on our next scheduled trip.

This time it was to the Bertillon Room. We had to march through the guardroom and the officers on duty there gave us an unsmiling once-over.

In a hallway on the top floor of the Administration Building we were ordered to sit on long benches flanking a frosted glass door. A sign, tacked to the wall to the right of the doorway, bore the single word "Identification." We were allowed to smoke. A little man wearing thick eyeglasses stuck his head out of the doorway and called out a name and number.

It was a slow procedure made slower by the presence of the guard. Talking was forbidden. When my turn arrived I stepped into

a small room crammed from floor to ceiling with steel filing cabinets. The little man in charge led me to a corner where, beside a paper-littered desk, stood a narrow table. The square of plate glass, the ink roller, and the crumpled tube of black ink on it were familiar.

My fingerprints had been taken so often in the police station, in the county jail, and in Sing Sing that the whole business had become routine. I did not have to be told to keep my hand limp and I resented the little man's advice that I do so. He squeezed out a blob of ink and with the roller spread it into a thin film on the glass plate. I held my right hand over the plate while he delicately pressed the ball of each finger into the ink, rolling it gently so that only the ridges of the whorls picked up the blacking. The same careful pressure and rolling were repeated on a square of cardboard bearing my name, number, date, nature of crime, date of conviction, sex, height, weight, color of eyes and hair, and ruled-off squares for each finger. In the lower left-hand corner was a special square for the thumb.

When I was eight or nine years old the little finger of my right hand was mashed while I was blackening the hoofs of a horse belonging to Curran's Funeral Parlor on Second Avenue and Sixty-third Street. The bone and flesh were pretty well mangled and a local doctor did the best he could in the way of a quick repair job. The result was a slightly distorted finger tip and a deep scar running diagonally through the loops and whorls. After he had pressed the print of this finger on the card the little man smiled for the first time. "God! This is a lulu!" he said. He pointed out how clearly the scar showed up. It was like a special brand, an exclusive mark, and I felt ashamed.

The fingerprints taken, I was handed an oily, soiled rag soaked in turpentine, and while I wiped the ink off my fingers the little man filed the card bearing my prints in one of the steel cabinets.

The idea of being a combination of numbers, of a particular pattern of loops and whorls on a piece of cardboard in an indexed file, frightened me. I knew that bars could be cut and walls could be sealed and I knew, too, that there would be no escaping the cards with their numbers and their prints. There might be escape from the prison but there could be no escape from the filing cabinets. Destroying one card, one file, one dossier, meant nothing.

The cards multiplied like a virus. In offices in New York City, in Washington, in Albany, in Ossining, in Dannemora, the custodians of the cards were photographing, microphotographing, and photostating them in duplicate, in triplicate, in quadruplicate. The cards were being filed and cross-filed. They were being indexed, cross-indexed, checked and counterchecked.

The industrious, anonymous custodians of the cards were forever creating newer and more complex system for filing. They were constantly inventing better cabinets, burglarproof, fireproof, earthquakeproof. They were devising intricate machines that would check without the possibility of error. They were fashioning the very newest indexing machines, ultra-violet ray, infra-red ray, teletype machines, and an infinite variety of photo, microphoto, and photostating machines. The custodians were physicists, mathematicians, and engineers. They were designers and manufacturers, directors and associate directors. They were secretaries, typists, and clerks — an army dedicated to the task of keeping John Resko #22818 in the proper file, in the proper drawer, in the proper cabinet, in the proper prison, for all time to come.

Next I was ordered into a connecting room separated from the fingerprinting room by a dusty gray blanket. "Take your coat and shirt off," the little man said. He pointed to a feeble-looking table. "Put them on there until we're finished."

I stripped to the waist. The room was small, one end of it completely dominated by an old-fashioned camera set up on a permanent easel. I stood near a three-paneled screen painted a dead white. In front of the screen and bolted to the floor stood an ancient chair such as I remember having seen in front of saloons, pool-rooms, and the Italian-American Social Democratic Club on Fourteenth Street. Behind the chair and also bolted to the floor was a contrivance, made of metal and probably built by Daguerre himself, designed to clamp to the back and sides of the skull, to hold the head erect, facing front and center.

The little man fiddled around under the black cloth of his camera. "Be with you in a minute!" His voice was muffled. "Meantime, put those things on." An arm crept out from under the cloth and a finger pointed to the wall behind me. "Those things" hung on a single nail in the wall — a wine-colored jacket of indeterminate

shape, size, and age, and a celluloid bib complete with high, stiff collar and an attached black bow tie.

"Okay, okay! Put it on! Put it on! There's nothing to it, just put it on!" He was grinning. The collar was dirty and reinforced with a steel spring which snapped tightly around my neck. The bib was equally dirty, cold against my skin, and curled away from my navel. I got into the jacket quickly. It covered me nicely from shoulders to knees.

"You look real pretty now." The little man grinned. "We'll get a fine portrait of you and everybody'll be happy. Right?" Right. I sat in the chair while he arranged the collar and lapels of the coat so that the bib and all parts of me except my face were covered. He adjusted the clamp behind me and forced my head between its curved prongs, tapping my chin upward until it was in position. He hurried back to his camera, ducked his head under the cloth, embraced the machine to make further adjustments, and aimed the lens at a spot midway between my eyes. "Be over in a minute, kiddo! All we have to do is complete the composition." He came back to where I sat and swiveled an arm, attached to the gadget holding my head, around in front of my chest. The arm held a strip of slotted tin containing the information — 22818.

The little man snapped a switch turning on floodlights on either side of me. He ducked under the camera cloth and I waited for the click of the lens feeling like a cartoon character.

The primary requirement for a rogues' gallery photograph is clarity of resemblance. People interested in such photos reject the proposition that tonal nuance and subtlety of composition are at least as important as resemblance. A rogues' gallery photograph must show such unaesthetic fundamentals as skeletal structure, muscular conformation, and dermatological phenomena represented by wrinkles, warts, wens, moles, knife scars, bullet scars, and scars caused by fire, acid, teeth, glass, icepick, balehook, or razor blade. It must show marks left by tattoo needle, gunpowder burn, wood or bamboo splinters, chicken pox, smallpox, and eczema. The convolutions of the ear, the conformation of the eye, and the thickness of the hair are equally essential details of this type of photograph. To the subject, the finished rogues' gallery photo is inevitably disappointing.

Morning was over by the time the last of us was mugged. We

marched directly from the Administration Building to the mess hall. The prison band was lined up in the rotunda, playing a march. We were ordered to keep in step to the music. The principal keeper, a lean, fierce old man, stood near the mess-hall entrance, inspecting each company as it marched by. Standing at attention at either side of the P.K. were members of the strong-arm squad. The rigid rule for all cons in Dannemora was: Line up, button up, and shut up! and the P.K. was there to see that it was being obeyed. Get out of step, have one button undone, or try to say one word out of the side of your mouth and the P.K. would have the strong-arm squad yank you out of line and give you a workout to whatever tune the band happened to be playing.

Beef stew for dinner. Chunks of meat and fat in a heavy, dark brown gravy. Three slices of bread and a cup of warm coffee. I worked out a system for handling the stew. By picking out the more promising pieces of meat and wiping off the greasy gravy on one slice of bread, I was able to manage a fairly edible sandwich. The coffee tasted no different than it had at breakfast, but it was coffee and that was all that mattered.

Prison officials, from the newest guard to the warden, are acutely aware of the importance of food in the running of a prison. The mess hall is the focal point of the institution. Most riots begin or are prevented in the mess hall — depending on the quality and quantity of the food. Yet, in spite of all the experience, in spite of all the evidence of the convicts' constant preoccupation with food, feeding is a secondary consideration with the men who run the prisons. The mess hall is operated on a rigid schedule. Inmates must be brought in at a given time, they have a given amount of minutes allotted to them for their meals, and the mess hall must be emptied at a given time. The important thing is to get the men out to the shops; get the men out of the recreation yard; get the men locked in for the night. Squeeze feeding in so that it will not interfere with these considerations.

The inmates are aware of this and resent it. The everlasting complaint is that the food is not good, and growing out of this are the additional beefs that the portions are too small, the menu monotonous, and the meals bunched too closely together. Breakfast begins at seven and is over at seven-fifteen. Dinner, the big meal of the day, begins at exactly noon and at twelve-fifteen some two thou-

sand men are on their way back to the shops. Supper starts at precisely five and at five-fifteen the prison is being locked up for the night.

The prohibitions against talking in the mess hall, against turning our heads, against asking for additional food, did not rankle so much as the necessity for rushing through the little food we were allowed. When the guard's club ordered your company to "Get up!" and "March!" you got up and marched even though you might have hardly begun your meal. The fifteen-minute eating periods were flexible — up to fifteen minutes. Breakfast and supper lasted, generally, between ten and thirteen minutes — precisely enough time to bolt two or three spoonfuls of mush and coffee or a slice of bologna and tea.

In those days convicts had to accept anything: dirty mess hall, roaches baked into the bread, maggots in the mush and spaghetti, lumps of fat instead of meat — anything. The most difficult hardship, we felt, was being rushed through our meals. We beefed about it at all times. We cursed the system and the officials because of it, and occasionally we flared up into brutal riots because of it.

FIVE

MY COMPANY SPENT THE WHOLE OF THAT AFTERNOON SITTING ON wooden benches in the waiting room of the hospital. A line of old-timers stretched despondently from the clinic into the room where we sat. Syphilitics. They were stripped to the waist and they held hats, shirts, and coats over their arms. They were so preoccupied with their own troubles that they paid no attention to us. Their line moved slowly, absorbing shots of mercury and salvarsan. One of our group confided to his neighbor, "I guess I'll be pushin the ol dog line myself nex week. . . . Never could pass up a chippy — it's all good even if it's bad." The waiting room returned to silence except for the nervous shuffle of the syphilitics, edging up for their shots or coming out of the clinic contemplating a small square of gauze held in the crook of the elbow.

We followed the unhappy line into the clinic, lining up behind one another as our numbers were called. The clinic was a surprise. It was like the clinic of any hospital. Any outside hospital. In fact it was larger, cleaner, and more efficient-looking than the clinic of the hospital where I had been taken after a twenty-four-hour session in the police station. A doctor and two inmate nurses were on duty. I was told to take off everything except trousers and socks, and my height, weight, temperature, pulse, and blood pressure were recorded on a card. My vision and reflexes were tested. The doctor examined my ears, nose, and throat, sounded my chest, and asked me to drop my pants. I breathed deeply and coughed while he felt for a possible hernia. He noted that one of my testicles was abnormal and when I explained that I had been kicked around in the police station he shook his head. He was sympathetic.

I had been punctured so often since the day the police turned me over to the doctors in the prison ward that the sight of a table displaying neat rows of needles and vials was old stuff. One of the nurses wound a rubber tube around my right arm and while he attached a needle to a vial bearing my name and number I opened and closed my hand several times, bringing the veins of my arm into relief. A quick jab and I was watching my blood pumping into the glass container. No poking or missing or trying over again. These guys knew what they were doing. I walked out pressing a tab of gauze over the puncture.

The psychiatrist's office was on the same floor as the clinic. The psychiatrist's office was really two connecting offices — a large bare room with two barred windows which, with the help of the sun, were throwing a geometric pattern over a big flat-topped desk, and a smaller room used as storage for the psychiatrist's confidential files.

The officer ordered me to sit in a chair placed in the center of the room and at a right angle to the desk. He left, closing the door behind him. I stared across the room at a blank wall.

I fixed my eyes on a spot on the wall and kept them there, reminding myself over and over to relax, relax, relax. I was all anxiety and hostility, and very much on the defensive. I didn't like bug doctors and I didn't trust them. I knew I was being watched and studied. Strands of cigarette smoke from behind the desk were clues to the psychiatrist's whereabouts.

"You may smoke if you wish."

In my desperate need for a smoke, I had trouble getting a cigarette out of the pack and more trouble in lighting it. I felt I was giving myself away, revealing a weakness. I tried to calm myself, certain I had fallen into a trap.

The cigarette was finally lit and my eyes went back to the blank wall. I refused a strong urge to look toward the desk. I decided that looking at the bug doctor would be another sign of weakness. I smoked slowly, not shifting my eyes, alert, suspicious, and stubborn. About ten minutes went by.

"There's no need for you to be frightened or worried." The voice was neutral, unemotional. "You can put your cigarette out here."

I walked to the desk. The first thing I noticed were sneakers,

crossed on the desk top. I followed a long stretch of trousers, a narrow black tie that receded into shadow, and at long last I made out the features of a gaunt, expressionless face earnestly puffing away at a cigarette.

Dr. Friedman did not move.

"The Sing Sing report on you says you're a bright boy. . . ."

I let that one go.

"Did you ever work for a living?"

"Yes, sir."

"Doing what?"

"Sailor, sir."

"Do you masturbate?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you think you have a right to go around killing people?"

"No."

"When did you decide that?"

"In the Death House."

"Do you feel you're getting a raw deal?"

I let that one go too.

He got up, lighting a fresh cigarette from the one he had been smoking. He held a flashlight close to each of my eyes, flashing it on and off. He made me sit and cross my knees, then tapped away with a small rubber hammer.

"Have you a family?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know what serving the rest of your life in prison means?"

"I think so. . . ."

"Well, it's all up to you. You can make it tough for yourself or you can make it easy. If you have any problems or if anything bothers you, come up to see me. Any officer will bring you up any time during the day. Just ask. You can go back now and tell the officer to send the next man in."

That was all.

Well, almost all. I had to admit that I felt better for having said a few things which I'd been hiding from myself. I had left some fear and a lot of resentment with the bug doctor. That seemed good too.

SIX

THE RECREATION YARD WHISTLE BLEW BEFORE EVERYONE IN MY company was interviewed. We were under quarantine and all of us knew there would be no recreation for us until the P.K. got good and ready. We marched back to our cells but instead of being locked in immediately were allowed to run down to the flats to get our supply of water for the night. Smoking and talking were permitted. It was almost like a holiday.

One of the guys with whom I had a nodding acquaintance was burning up. He was so completely death-struck that everyone avoided him. He was behind me in line, waiting for his turn at the faucet which supplied the block. I thought some small talk might calm him down so I said something about "the bastards doing us out of our recreation time." It was a mild beef which ordinarily would draw an automatic agreement and be forgotten but this man exploded, raving, cursing, frothing at the mouth, and making no sense at all. Everybody around became quiet, edging away from him, figuring he was blowing his top and hoping his violence would be directed against the next guy. But he shut up, got his water, and stalked off. The rest of us agreed he was a dangerous nut, shrugged, and went about our business. There was nothing we could do about him except keep our eyes open — just in case.

The moment I stepped up on 25 gallery I saw him standing in front of my cell. Well, he's picked me, I thought, there's nothing to do but go through with it. I walked slowly toward the cell, planning how to handle him. The first move he makes, I'll throw the water in his face and from then on it will be every man for himself.

I couldn't imagine just an ordinary fist fight — not with a bug. It would be biting, kicking, gouging all the way.

The veins in his neck were swollen but he didn't swing at me or make a sudden move. He was still blowing off steam.

"The bastards," he started, "the rotten dirty bastards. Alla them. The cons anna screws. Alla them. The bastards!"

"Well . . ." I hoped to ease him off even though I had no idea as to what caused all the fury. "You know how it is. . . ."

"Yeah. I sure do. The bastards. Rotten. Dirty. Alla them. Even the bug doctor. Bastard!"

"Jesus! What the hell did he do? He was easy on me."

"Easy? Why, the bastard! Ya know what he wantid ta know? The dirty bastard! I could tearim apart!" He made ripping motions with his hands, his jaw muscles twitched with the effort. "Killim! That's what I'd like ta do! Tearim apart!"

"Well, for Christ's sake, what did he do? Is he going to bug you? What is it?"

"No! No, nothin like that. The bastard! Y'know what he wantid ta know? Did I ever screw my ol lady! Imagine a rotten bastard like that! What does he think I am? Askin me a thing like that! I could ripim apart . . .!"

He was getting it out of his system. Calming down. I listened until the crazy light died out of his eyes.

"Look, maybe you misunderstood the guy. Maybe it was one of those tricky questions that all the bug doctors use. Maybe he didn't mean what you think. He was easy with me. In fact I got the feeling he was trying to help. . . ."

He glared at me and turned away, exploding:

"Bullshit!"

SEVEN

THAT EVENING, AFTER THE GALLERY MAN HAD SERVICED OUR COMPANY with water and started making passes, he wedged a rolled-up bundle into my cell gate. I thought he had made a mistake and told him so.

"I dunno, kid! Ya see here?" He pointed to the package. On the margin, in bold print, were the numbers 25-24. "That's all I know. It says twenny-five twenny-four an this is twenny-five twenny-four. That's all I know."

The bundle contained a one-day-old copy of the *Daily News* and the previous month's *Film Fun* magazine. I thought that as soon as whoever sent the reading material found out, or remembered he had marked the wrong cell number on it, he'd send a gallery man up for it. In the meantime I could catch up with the news.

I read every word in that issue of the *Daily News*, including the editorial. *Film Fun*, judging from its cover, offered a lot more. I had leafed through about half the magazine when I came across a folded note with the name "John" printed by the same hand and pencil that had printed 25-24 on the newspaper margin. Well, I'm John and though I still felt that a mistake had been made I unfolded the note and read:

Hello,

I'm sending along the mag and newspaper to help you pass the evening. Must ask you to return the mag as a few more friends have to see it. You can throw or give the paper away. Your friend Nick hangs out on the same court with me and asked me to send you some reading and whatever else you

might need. Your company will be out in the yard tomorrow and me and Nick will be looking for you. Don't let this rat-hole get you down. Be seeing you tomorrow.

Hold it up

Duke

I'd never heard of Duke and I couldn't think of a Nick in Dannemora who might know me. The note was meant for me, no doubt of that. The reference to my company being out in the yard the following day, to not letting the place get me down, were obviously meant for a newcomer. That's what I was. I was also suspicious. This must be some kind of a swindle. Maybe a wolf. Maybe a con man. Maybe a guy planning to put the bull on me. It was easier to assume the worst than to imagine that there might be a friend around. Well, I would stop worrying about it. Just let the thing develop from the Duke's end and if it was a swindle, then I'd just put a stop to it right away.

Meantime, there was the *Film Fun* with its stimulating art studies of hopeful Hollywood starlets. I lost myself in the magazine's offerings so completely that I forgot all about Duke, Nick, the hullabaloo, the clamor. I even forgot the silent presence of the bedbugs. It was so good to look upon a female — even in black and white. It was good to have so many from which to choose. Blonde, brunette, redhead. In black and white you made them the way you wanted them. Tall, medium, short. From Juno to Diana, from Queenie to Polack Rose. All wonderful, all bewitching, and all so easy to bring to life — with a whole story attached. Just close your eyes and there she was — the hefty blonde on page 17, the one wearing the two-piece, polka-dotted bathing suit which wrinkled just right over the polka dots in the just right place. Or, if you felt like it, switch to the other one, the brunette. The long slender one, so alluring against the phony South Seas background. Better yet — how about both!

Forget Dannemora. Forget the rest of your life. Forget the grayness and the monotony, the walls and the cells, the screws and the cons, the fear and the hopelessness. Create another world. A living, colorful, happy world, limited only by the sum of your experience. Create a world that is easy to escape into, a world that caters exclusively to your wishes. That's the simplest, the most pleasant way

out. There is no need to worry about how many bars are between you and freedom, how many feet of concrete wall, how many miles to home. There's only one trouble — you have no control over the time you may spend in this joyful, carefree world. You are having a marvelous time. You have this magnificent blonde and you have this spicy brunette, you are their Big Man and there is never going to be an end to this. . . .

A bell rings, a heavy-footed guard goes by making the eight o'clock count, a bedbug bites deeply into your belly. You are back in your stone room, cursing the guard, the loudspeakers, the bedbugs.

A bedbug bite on any part of you makes you itch and scratch all over. You get the delusion that you are being eaten alive. You know that there are only so many drops of blood in your entire being and you know that one bug equals at least one drop. There are millions of bugs — ten, a hundred, a thousand times as many as there are drops of blood in you — and each bug existing for the sole purpose of getting its share.

You forget the *Film Fun* girls — particularly the handsome blonde. The New York *Daily News* offers hope.

I stripped the bed, shaking out and examining the blanket, the sheet, the pillow, and the pillowcase, making certain no bedbugs were concealed in them. I folded the bedding, piling it out of the way on top of the bucket. The mattress was bad. Its seams were alive with bugs which I scraped out onto the floor. In desperation, I stepped on as many as could not escape. By the time I had cleaned the mattress, the floor was covered with damp spots. I pulled the mattress off the bed, leaning it against the wall.

The New York *Daily News*, torn in half, equipped me with a fine supply of tapers which I laid out in a row on top of the bed-spring. I lit one and, beginning at the head of the bed, moved the taper back and forth in a short arc. I kept the flame in constant contact with the spring, delighted that the paper did not smoke. I watched the bugs scurry, squirm, ignite, pop, and burn to ashes. As each taper burned down I lit another from it. My cell began to stink. The paper gave off an acrid odor which blended with the stench of hundreds of charred carcasses. I was so absorbed in the burning, in the hope of a full night of sleep, that I forgot to listen for the count.

"What's the matter? Can't take a couple of bugs?"

A guard was standing at my cell gate and all I could think of was the Dannemora rule against making fires in the cells. I thought: I'm really in dutch. He's got me dead to rights and this is a hell of a way to begin my bit.

But the guard was grinning. He cautioned, "Better hurry it up! Watch the smoke and the fire. . . ."

I finished the burning quickly, made my bed, and cleaned the cell as well as I could. The guard left me with a good feeling and the prospect of a night's sleep increased the goodness.

Things could be worse.

EIGHT

AT SIX-THIRTY THE MORNING BELL GOT ME OUT OF BED, refreshed and feeling better about Dannemora. I washed, dressed, had a smoke, and made the bed. The fire purge had not been thorough enough — the bed sheet was streaked with blood. Well, there would be more newspapers and matches to take care of the survivors.

After emptying our buckets we were locked in our cells. Double-locked. There would be no action for our company this morning. The gallery man doled out water, made a few passes, and disappeared. I went through *Film Fun* once more, smoked too much, paced the three and one half steps, turn, three and one half steps, turn, until I was tired and dizzy. About midmorning I thought I'd test the back wall of my cell.

The bricks were hidden by a dozens of layers of paint. Around the small hole through which the wires of my cell passed, paint had been chipped away, down to brick. The mortar was firm, the bricks solid — only a sledge hammer would get through that wall.

The gate was just as formidable. It was bolted and riveted into a steel frame, which in turn was bolted and riveted into the stout brick wall. Not much hope here either. However, with patience, with ingenuity, with courage, a man could think of a way of overcoming any obstacle. All he needed was time, and I had plenty of that. The saying was that every time a better lock was made someone would figure out a better way of opening it.

Spaghetti with thin sauce was on the menu for dinner. The guy sitting on my left, a con man calling himself Carl Bergson, threw

up and was taken out of the mess hall. I had seen him picking up one string of spaghetti at a time and examining it before eating it. I thought he was being overfastidious. After a guard had taken him out I looked at his plate — the rim was covered with small, white, wriggling worms. Fear of punishment kept me from vomiting my own dinner.

Carl was keep-locked. This meant he was under arrest pending investigation and would be kept locked in his cell until the principal keeper acted upon the charges filed against him. A narrow tin sign, on which were painted the words "Keep Locked," was placed on his cell gate to indicate to all guards that that cell was not to be opened until the sign was removed. The sign itself was a symbol feared and resented by the inmates. The guards used it as a threat and as a means of satisfying personal grudges.

Since the sign on the gate meant that the gate could not be unlocked until the sign was removed, and since the sign could not be removed until the inmate of that cell had been brought to trial before the principal keeper, and since the principal keeper would not bring a man to trial until a formal charge had been made out by the arresting officer, it was possible to keep a man locked up forever.

All any officer had to do was put a sign on an inmate's gate and not file charges.

Ridiculous?

Unbelievable?

Spanish Joe did not think so. Spanish Joe spent seven years in a South Hall cell. Spanish Joe had been keep-locked through a riot, a change in administration, and a siege with tuberculosis. He would be keep-locked today, this very moment, if his sentence had not expired. No one knew why Spanish Joe had been keep-locked. No one knew who had put the sign on his gate.

It was different with Tom Meany. He knew why he was keep-locked. He'd been caught smoking in one of the shops. He had been caught by a guard who did not like him. The reason for the sign was legitimate — Tom never questioned that. But after two years of eating, sleeping, washing, urinating, defecating in his cell, Tom Meany got the curious notion that he could help himself by committing suicide. That got him out of his cell all right. The guards pulled him down before the homemade noose killed him. He was

sent across the wall to the State Hospital for the Criminally Insane where he spent twelve years.

To the convict, it makes little difference where he does his time, the important thing is that the time be served. The bughouse is the only place where a con, when he has served his time, may not be released. If he is still thought mentally unfit he will be kept on. When Tom was sent back to the prison he was beaten and scared right to the core.

That afternoon we had no time to ponder Carl Bergson's predicament. We were ordered out of our cells by a shouted "Get ready for a bath!" I wrapped a cake of soap and a clean pair of socks in a towel. I was ready. The company lined up in our assigned places and marched off to the West Hall like old-timers.

The old bathhouse in Dannemora was an afterthought attached to the West Hall. The side of the hall had been punched through to permit passage into a brick-walled enclosure covered by a sky-lighted roof. For some queer, probably aesthetic and certainly non-functional reason, arched colonnades, forming a passageway around the walls, had been included in the general decorative scheme. A five-foot-high concrete wall stretched out in the center of the space formed by the colonnades. Spaced at three-foot intervals on either side of this wall were partitions making up a total of twenty-six stalls on each side. A pipe lay on the top of the long wall, sprouting a sprinkler into each stall. One valve, operated by an inmate assigned to the bathhouse, controlled the water which, inevitably, was either too hot or too cold.

Inside the colonnade were benches placed along the walls. There we undressed and left our clothes while showering. There were no assigned stalls. You got into the first one that appealed to you or the last one that was left, depending on how fast you undressed. Everything was calculated to the second: so many officers available for the bathhouse detail; so many companies to bath each day; so much time between breakfast and dinner and dinner and supper. Every factor neatly divided into an average of fifteen minutes per company per week. Saturdays, Sundays and holidays excluded.

Keeping clean in Dannemora in the summer of 1932 was a tough proposition. The water was too hot, the State-issue soap did not lather, and the company guard was impatient, striding up and

down, urging us to "Hurry it up! Hurry it up!" There was no joking and there was no talking. Everyone was too busy hurrying it up! hurrying it up!

The word that we would be allowed recreation that afternoon had been making the rounds since dinnertime. Nothing official, but there was no resisting the assurance of the rumor. All the men in our company were so certain.

"So-and-so told me!"

"Yeah, but *how* does he know?"

"Why, he got it straight from So-and-so!"

"Okay, but how does *he* know?"

"Fa Chrissakes, don'cha know he got connections out front?"

That settled it. "Connections out front" was the final, the irresistible, the indisputable proof of accuracy. Sure enough, at three-thirty when the prison whistle announced the end of the working day, we were alerted by the company guard, who came down the gallery to tell every man — except Carl Bergson — to get ready for the yard.

I felt nervous, excited, worried. I was still a stranger and Danemora was still a strange place. Then, too, there was Duke. I hadn't forgotten him. My suspicions hadn't lessened ~~and~~ I was upset because something was happening which I had not expected — something which was not in the book and which I would have to cope with.

I tried to picture the companies marching into the yard but all I could imagine was an endless line of gray legs moving up and forward and down and each company was a gray centipede without a face.

The gate brakes on the gallery slammed open and our guard was shouting, "All right! Line up on the flats. Hurry it up! Hurry it up!"

NINE

THE HEAVY, BARRED, DOUBLE DOORS OPENING INTO THE YARD are set in at the point where the rotunda joins the West Hall. As you step out of the building you are confronted by a steep hill. The recreation area is just beyond.

A line of pink rosebushes makes a boundary between the yard and the prison buildings. Beyond the rosebushes is a mountain, notched untidily, raggedly terraced, cluttered with haphazardly constructed tables and benches. That is the recreation yard.

The mountain is littered with countless empty tin cans. It is studded with oil drums serving as stoves — rusty, fire-stained, standing on end and giving off dirty gray smoke. Here is a mountain made grotesque by the careless gouging of thousands of convicts, a mountain with its outer clay shamelessly exposed, its boulders tumbled down to the level ground which is designated the baseball field. A mountain that looks sad and out of place in the gray dust, a mountain denuded of trees and imprisoned by reinforced concrete walls.

The cell blocks, the bucket house, the mess hall, the bathhouse, and now the recreation yard. This was piling it on. Dismay upon dismay. Fear upon fear. What kind of men permitted this? Encouraged this? Underwrote it? Swore by it as the only logical, practical, humane way by which their fellow men could be taught the difference between right and wrong?

The recreation yard is part of the new, revolutionary rehabilitation program. Part of the enlightened approach to resocialization. Recreation — that's it! A healthy body makes for a healthy mind

and a healthy mind leads to a healthy soul. Someone in the State legislature grudgingly admits that this might be so.

Lots of money, hundreds of thousands of dollars, are appropriated. Now the very first thing to do is build more enclosures for the about-to-be-resocialized convicts. Walls and more walls. As soon as the concrete hardens and the walls are manned, the sinners are herded into the enclosed space and told, "All right, fellas, you've got a recreation yard, build yourselves up! Make yourselves healthy in mind and body and spirit! Re-create yourselves! It's for your own good! From now on it's all up to you. . . ."

The sinners feel that the first step in building up their bodies is filling their bellies. They spread out over the walled-in hillside, they stake out patches of ground, they level it off and they plan ahead; this corner for a stove, that spot for a table and benches, some space for visiting friends and a little more space for storing wood and pots and dishes.

To hell with the mind and soul.

Sinners can get coffee from the commissary, from home, and sometimes from other sinners working in the mess hall or store-room. A good many pounds of coffee and sugar are stolen out of the prison stores. With the acumen of sharp, enterprising businessmen, these sinners who steal them undersell Chase & Sanborn, Savarin, Maxwell House, Jack Frost, and Domino, and still realize a thousand per cent profit. The storekeeper and the mess-hall guards know this, but find it difficult to prevent it, explaining shortages by shrugging their collective shoulders and pointing out that "You can't trust the thieving bastards!"

Mothers and wives, brothers and sisters and good friends are permitted to send salami, spaghetti, milk, an occasional chicken, a meat loaf. The courts in the recreation yard are the only places where food may be cooked, where friends may sit at the same table to share the luxuries provided by those who think of them. The recreation yard becomes a vast kitchen with every man his own cook and bottle washer. Every court has an oil-drum stove or a fireplace made of stones. The yard becomes littered with the remains of tens of thousands of meals.

Court space becomes a major problem when an enterprising con shows the way to the others by scratching out a tiny garden which yields tomatoes, cucumbers, and lettuce. Every man becomes a

gardener. The more daring are soon adding parsley, sage, pumpkins, and marijuana to their crops. Attempts are made to convert the handball area into gardens, but the warden's office will have none of that and the project is abandoned.

Space is at a premium and newcomers are out of luck unless they have, or make, friends with courts. They are destined to wander, homeless, with the punks, rats, and fags, in an endless circle around the fringes of the baseball field. The new mickey, if and when he proves himself to be a right guy, will be invited to share a court with some group of old-timers. He will be expected to contribute to the upkeep, welfare, and respect of his court, according to his abilities.

The wrong guy, the squealer or the homo, the pimp or the rape artist does not have a court of his own. His neighbors will not tolerate him and prison opinion will soon force him back to the endless walk around the ballfield. Occasionally a pimp or a rapist is invited to share a court — but only when he establishes respectability by proving he was framed. Now and then a homo finds a court on which he is tolerated only so long as he serves the owner or owners according to his own specialized abilities.

A neat distinction is made between homosexuals, and punks. A homo is a fag who was "born that way," while a punk "became that way" for money or its equivalent. Keeping a fag or punk, however, requires a sterling reputation as a tough guy — and a willingness to back it up. Wolves or fag-chasers are generally condemned by the other cons.

Squealers, rats, are out. No one will have anything to do with them and everyone is ready to find offense in them. They lead sad, solitary lives, forever suspect, forever on the defensive, forever exposed to contempt, ridicule, and violence.

TEN

THE TALL SOFT-LOOKING GUY GRINNED, NODDED. "YOU JOHNNY Resko?"

I guessed who he was.

"I'm Duke. Howaya?"

We shook hands and I relaxed a little. If this was a swindle, it would take time to work out.

"Well, howdaya like the goddam place?"

I answered with a grin and he nodded again. "Yeah, I know! It's a bitch, ain't it?"

We surveyed the yard silently, then Duke said, "Well, I guess it could be worse. Meantime, let's go up to the court an put the coffee on for the boys. Nick'll be out in a few minutes."

A narrow path, its course determined by the size and shape of the courts around which it twisted, led us up a steep hill. At one point, where it abruptly went off at a right angle only to return a few feet away, I started to cross the court which it skirted. Duke, who was behind me, pulled me back. "Look, Johnny, you never step on anybody's court unless you're invited or unless you got trouble with the people on it an want to do something about it! The guys up here are funny about their courts — some of them'll get real nasty even though they know you don't mean anything by crossing their places."

Respect for and defense of private property were fanatically insisted upon by the entire convict community, Duke pointed out. We walked around the sharp bend and my new friend continued the briefing.

"It's the same with celis. Never go into a guy's cell unless he

asks you or, like I said before, you got trouble with him an wanna straighten it out. That's the way things are, up here. You wanna remember. You know, if you find a guy in your cell, you can kill him an get away with it. Self-defense. There ain't a screw in the joint'll bother you. The same thing goes for your court. You don't have to be miserable about it, but keep strangers off!"

On the way up cons kept greeting Duke with "Hi," a nod or raised hand — the universal gesture of good will. Duke was well known and liked, which meant he was respected.

Except for minor variations, all the courts on the way up appeared identical. A ten-foot square of terraced hillside, in the center a simple table — four legs and a top — several benches, a stack of wood, and in one of the corners a place for cooking. Greenery appeared on practically every court and usually as a border, a line of demarcation. Practical greenery — food for the stomach. There were many tomato plants.

Near the very top of the mountain, with only the handball-court terrace between us and the wall, Duke stopped.

"Well, here we are, Johnny. . . ."

He stepped into a court. A court like all the other courts I had seen. I followed, wondering what was coming next.

"The boys are due out. If you start a fire" — he pointed to a stone fireplace loosely put together — "I'll get the water."

He went off with a galvanized tin pail and I set about making a fire. Old newspapers and wood were stacked neatly next to the fireplace and in half a minute I had a brisk blaze going. Duke returned with a pailful of water. We poured some into the coffeepot — a one-gallon tin which originally had been designed to hold grade B tomatoes especially picked and processed for State hospitals and institutions — now thickly caked with the soot of hundreds of fires.

Coffee is coffee. The idea is to find a balance between the water and the ground bean and the necessary amount of heat to blend the two into a thick, black brew. No percolating problems. No timing problems. Just dump the coffee into the water, put it over a good hot fire, and when it is black it is done.

Duke set the table while the coffee was brewing. From behind the woodpile he produced four glass jars of assorted sizes and shapes and onetime containers for peanut butter and jam. He hand-

ed these to me, instructing me to rinse them in the leftover water. From the same place he came up with a can of evaporated milk and another jar — tightly capped and full of sugar.

"You gotta keep everything covered in this place or the goddam ants an rats'll get at it. Look what they do!" He showed me a tomato plant belonging to the court. The fruit was not yet ripe and all the tomatoes on the lower branches had been gnawed by the rats.

"You think the screws do anything about them? Not a goddam thing! Christ, there's so many around here they're coming into the cells and I don't mean two-legged ones either! I'm not kidding. . . .

"You don't know Lefty yet. He'll be up here any second now," Duke went on, "he hangs out here with us. Well, only a coupla days ago he killed a rat in his cell. Found it under the bed chewing away at his shoes. This big!" He held out his hands to about the size of an alley cat. "Jesus! The place is crawling with them!" He nodded for emphasis. "Rats! Rats all over the place an I don't know which are the worse, the four-legged or the two-legged. That's one thing you wanna be careful about, Johnny. The two-legged rats. I know what I'm talking about when I tell you, 'Don't have anything to do with wrong guys.' Anything at all!"

A hollow-faced man with hard blue eyes and a hard mouth stepped into the court with a casual "Hi!" Duke turned to the newcomer. "Howaya, Lefty!" His thumb pointed at me. "This is the guy Nick was telling 'us about. Johnny, meet Lefty."

Lefty and I shook hands. There was something about him that I liked. He was quiet, dignified, strong — a man who had experienced many hard blows without cracking. I hoped he would become a good friend.

The three of us inspected the coffee, which had been boiling for some time. We agreed that it was done — the liquid was about the color of the outside of the pot. We were still discussing it when I was mugged from behind. I yanked away, alert, ready to swing, and turned to face a lanky, laughing guy with a big mouth and dead gray eyes.

"Howya, Johnny! I see Duke found ya all right. I'm Nick. Shake an let's have some coffee!"

We shook. I relaxed slowly but remained puzzled because I couldn't remember or recognize Nick. From his obvious friendliness, I felt I should.

"Can't make me out, can ya?"

I shook my head.

"Remember Sixteenth Street?"

"Sure. That's my block. I lived there. . . ."

"Yeah, I know. Remember Wasserman the guy who sold second hand furniture? Remember Pastorino? Remember Baranowski?"

I nodded to each question.

"Well, that's me, Nick Baranowski."

Duke poured coffee into the jars. We sat around the table and Duke and Lefty listened, silent, while Nick went on.

"You usta go ta P. S. 40 with my kid brother. . . ."

"Sure. Custy. How is he? How's he doing?"

"He's all right. Drivin a truck fa Wanamaker's." Nick turned to the other two, laughing. "These kids usta drive their ol ladies crazy. Always fightin with each other just fa the hell of it." He turned to me for confirmation. "Ain't it so?"

It was so.

"But Christ help any outside sonofabitch who picked on either one of them! They'd mob him! Ain't that so?"

Amen. . . .

"Ya still play the fiddle?"

"No. I gave it up when I went to work."

"Yeah. Custy too. My ol lady usta give this guy two bits a lesson ta teach the kid brother," he explained to the others.

No questions about what I was in for. No questions about the amount of time I had to serve. They must have gotten all the information about me a long time ago.

"Sure," Nick was saying, "I remember the ol man an the ol lady getting all hopped up when the Hunky paper wrote ya up fa winnin a prize or something at some concert. Ya know, Duke plays the fiddle too." He turned to Duke. "Lend it ta the kid, sometime, ya'll hear real playin!"

Duke was all for it. "Any time! Any time! I'll bring it out tomorrow. I don't play the goddam thing anyway. You can have it inna morning. . . ."

I felt good. I felt marvelous. Nick, in his own indirect way, was establishing points of common interest. All my suspicions disappeared. We finished our coffee and I pitched in happily, rinsing glasses, dousing the fire, and dumping the dirtied water out on the path.

Duke pointed in the direction of home plate on the ball field. "The water faucet is down there." Behind the plate and up against the wall a gray group waited in line with pails, buckets, and containers of every size, shape, and material. "You get in line and wait your turn. On every court, the first guy gets out in the yard gets the water, starts the fire. You know, whatever hasta be done. We all pitch in."

Lefty cut in. "That's right. The idea is for us to help each other, to make things easier for each other. We've all got to be in here and it's miserable enough without making it worse by pulling against each other."

This was the first time Lefty had spoken since I shook hands with him. I liked what he said. I liked his directness.

"You're getting a million-dollar education, kiddo!" Nick was pleased with the way I had been accepted by his friends.

I was grateful for the circumstance that had brought his parents into the same block in which my parents lived. I was grateful to Mr. and Mrs. Baranowski for having conceived Nick and, later, his brother. For having raised them both on Sixteenth Street. For having sent Custy to P. S. 40. For Custy. For the many fights I had had with him. For the endless ramifications of chance that had led into this situation. I had found a friend at a time when I needed one desperately.

On the way down the hill after recreation was over, Nick suddenly snapped his fingers. "Jesus! I almost forgot! Lissen, tonight you write a letter to the P.K. Tellim you wanna job inna weave shop. I already spoke ta the screw an he promised ta see the P.K. tonight, so don't forget! Okay? Give the note to O'Brien inna morning when ya come outa the mess hall. Everything is all set. It's not a bad shop but the main thing is ya'll get outa the reception company. Okay?"

Certainly okay with me.

Nick and Lefty must have discussed the matter during the day. The latter seemed to know all about it and backed Nick with a rare smile.

"Now don't forget, Johnny. The P.K. Mr. O'Brien. Write him a nice note and everything's all set. Gotta line up now, so take it easy."

They disappeared into the mob crisscrossing the ball field. Duke had a little more time and spent it helping me find the place where

my company lined up. His parting words were, "You do like Nick says. The weave shop is pretty good. An if Nick spoke up for you, you're in. He's the barber inna shop and stands aces with the screw. I'll bring the fiddle out tomorrow. Take it easy. . . ."

I was not surprised when the gallery man passed a newspaper into my cell that evening. I went through it page by page until I found what I had been half expecting, a note and several letter-heads which Duke had thoughtfully included. The note contained one sentence: "Don't forget. Mr. O'Brien." Mister, underlined with three lines, O'Brien, underlined with one line.

The note I wrote to Principal Keeper O'Brien explained that I would appreciate a job in the weave shop. I had friends working there and I believed that being in their company would help me settle down to prison life with a minimum of effort. I added, incidentally, that I wanted to learn a trade.

That night I slept soundly, undisturbed by bad dreams or bed-bugs.

ELEVEN

THE NEXT MORNING WHILE THE COMPANY WAS LINING UP FOR breakfast I asked permission of our guard to step out of line to see the principal keeper.

"All right. When we come outa the mess hall. Stop six feet away from him. Take off your hat an fold your arms across your chest. Stand at attention, then ask his permission to speak. That's all."

Six feet away. Fold your arms. No! Six feet away. Take off your hat. Fold your arms. Attention. Ask permission. Must not forget the sequence. Six feet away. Like approaching God.

I broke out of line at precisely the right moment and marched toward Mr. O'Brien, who leaned against the rotunda railing. The strong-arm squad flanking him watched my approach with speculative eyes. When I felt I had come close enough I stopped, removed my hat, and folded my arms. Mr. O'Brien kept me standing at attention for what seemed hours before swinging his eyes toward me.

"I'd like to speak to you, sir."

"What is it?"

"I have a request for a job, sir." The note was becoming damp in my palm.

"All right.

One of the strong-arm squad stepped forward, extending his hand.

I gave him the note and he ordered, "About face! Put your hat on and fall in behind the next company! Get back to your gallery as quickly as you can!"

It was done and it had not been too painful. I had worried about the P.K., who was known to be an ardent believer in the proposition that "clubs were trumps." I had pictured myself being battered by the strong-arm squad for no other reason than that I had the gall to ask for a job.

I felt elated and even the bucket house failed to depress me. I thought that in two or three days or a week I would be called out, interviewed by the P.K., and transferred to the weave shop.

We were kept in our cells all morning and I spent the time killing bugs and writing letters home. We were allowed to send out two letters a week, so each of my letters was addressed to two or more relatives. In each of the letters I begged Mom to send me the violin music she had put away after I'd stopped playing.

After dinner I settled down to rereading what was left of the newspaper. News of the outside world was important only because I was able to project myself into the places and situations with which it dealt. Stories of the great depression that was sweeping the country were interesting only because I could see the miseries and misfortunes of millions as a weak reflection of my own hopelessness. Stories about other lands, other people furnished a point of departure into a world of imaginings in which I always managed to have a good time. The drive to escape from reality was irresistible.

The hours in the cell, of being alone, were spent daydreaming of the outside world. I had not yet learned how to face myself, to live with myself.

I was pacing, imagining something wonderful and myself in the middle of it, oblivious to the cell, to the sounds, to the prison around me, when a guard, holding a slip of paper, jarred me out of it.

"All right! Come to! Start packing your things. You're being moved!"

Moved! That was great! Nick must have powerful connections for such quick action. The few things I had were hurriedly stuffed into a pillowcase and that was rolled in the blanket. I was ready.

The guard was young and uncommunicative. His single comment was, "East Hall."

I knew the way.

TWELVE

THE SLIP WAS HANDED TO THE HALL OFFICER AND THE GUARD who had brought me there disappeared, leaving me with my belongings, waiting for the next order.

The hall officer looked like a flashy middleweight. I found out later that's what he had been. He must have been good — his face was free of the usual marks.

He was the first guard in Dannemora that I saw smiling. Really smiling. His voice was low, pleasant, and implied: "What-the-hell-we're - all - human - and - I - can't - help - making - a - living - this - way-any-more-than-you-can-help-being-forced-to-live-this-way.

A very likeable guy.

"Just come in on the Sing Sing boat?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, you got a break getting outa the reception company so fast. Your friend Nick is a nice guy and I'm glad we got you over here."

"So am I!"

"How long you know Nick?"

"Since I was a kid. I went to school with his brother. Our families were friends."

"Say! That's nice! Well, I don't know where to put you right now. Weave-shop company is full up. Tell you what, I'll put you up there." He looked up at the gallery directly above where we stood. "It's the mess-hall company. I'll move you over with the weave-shop bunch soon's there's an empty cell. Okay?"

"Suits me fine, sir. I don't care where I lock as long as I'm working. Doing something."

"Sure, sure. The mess-hall company isn't too bad except in the morning. They're let out at five. But you'll get used to it in no time. By the way, I don't know if you guys've been to the commissary yet but if you need cigarettes or coffee or something, let me know. I like to take care of the boys in my hall."

Now here is a fine gesture, I thought, here is a man who does not know me and yet is ready to extend himself for me. Why couldn't all guards be like him?

"I could use cigarettes. . . ."

"Why, sure! Here, you write out whatever you want on this slip and I'll see to it that it's in your cell by this evening. Jesus! I hope you got some dough out front?"

"Oh yes, I got enough."

"Okay. Just wanta be sure you're covered, that's all."

I filled out the commissary slip he handed me. I ordered one carton of cigarettes.

"That all you want? How about coffee. Milk? Sugar?"

"Well, I'll have to speak to Nick about that. There's enough coffee and stuff out on the court."

"I know that, but how about for in your cell? You know," he grinned, "there's nothing like a good shot of coffee about eight, nine o'clock at night."

He let that seep in for a few seconds, then went on, "I know you guys are not supposed to cook in your cells, but I run this hall and I understand. Why, for Christ's sake there's nothing I like better than a cup of coffee myself! That's why I close my eyes when anyone's making a pot. Say! We better get on upstairs. Got all your stuff?"

He followed me up the stairs, informing me on the way that I was to lock in cell 31.

"It's clean. The guy who had it before you was a bug on scrubbing and painting. I don't know if there's a locker in it, but if not ask the gallery man, he'll fix you up."

Cell 31 was clean. It was different in another way from 25-24. It was larger. Not much, no more than eight to ten inches deeper, but I felt it the moment I stepped in. It was different, too, in that its walls were thicker and constructed of large stone blocks. Im-movable.

"Well, you're all set now. Get yourself fixed up and come down to the desk. Meanwhile I'll get your commissary order in."

I thanked him again.

And I thanked the gods for cell 31. The walls and ceiling were painted a pale gray-green that was soothing and gave the feeling of spaciousness. There were no cracks or breaks in the paint. No cracks or breaks where bedbugs might be tempted to settle down and raise innumerable generations to plague me.

Even the bed had been freshly painted a shining white which had not yet rubbed off, peeled, cracked, or tarnished. I thanked the departed previous occupant for his nuttiness, which had extended even to the slop bucket. This receptacle was clean, scrubbed inside and out, and serviced with a disinfectant. Its exterior was painted a dull, clean red.

This was a break. After the South Hall this was like moving into a fancy hotel. I made the bed, confident that no bugs were in its springs.

Back at the desk, the hall keeper smiled as usual. "All set?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Good. I just got your cigarette order through. You'll have the carton tonight. If you wanna smoke now, go ahead, ~~an~~ officer will be over soon to take you to the shop."

As soon as we stepped out of the East Hall I was conscious of a new sound. A low, continuous, uneven hum, increasing into an off-beat rattle as we approached the long, two-storied shop buildings, and breaking into a clashing, pounding, smashing clatter when we entered the weave shop.

This sound, this noise, was the barometer by which the social climate of the prison was gauged from seven-thirty in the morning until twelve o'clock noon and from twelve-thirty until three-thirty in the afternoon, every day except Sundays and holidays. I had been hearing it from the moment I entered Dannemora but had attributed it to a dynamo or turbine in the powerhouse. It got into every corner of the prison, into every cell, into every ear. It was heard without listening, felt without knowing. Its every tonal nuance could be accurately interpreted by the old-timers — inmates and guards. If it should suddenly stop, everyone would become worried. If it should suddenly stop, it could mean that a fuse had blown

or that one of the giant motors that powered the machines had broken down. Or it could mean that a riot had begun.

Its source was the weave shop.

The weave shop was really two weave shops separated by a stairway landing and tremendous metal doors. The shops occupied the whole of the upper floor of the concrete, convict-constructed building.

On the floor below were the cotton and tailor shops, the former being one of several shops in which the raw cotton and linen were processed into warps and bobbins for the weave shop.

I was assigned to Number 2 shop. The guard in charge spoke to me but with all the noise I couldn't make out a word he said. He raised his voice.

"Glad to see I still pull weight with the P.K. How much time you doing?"

"Life. I shouted.

"Fourth offender?"

"No, sir, first-degree murder."

"Jesus Christ! What the hell did you do? Kill somebody?"

That was funny. It *was* funny. Prison humor leans to the grisly. We both laughed.

"I understand you have friends in the shop?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, it's too late to put you on a machine now, I'll do that tomorrow. Meantime you can visit with your friends."

I was getting accustomed to the noise of the looms and learning how to anticipate the next word before it was spoken.

I greeted Nick with a happy grin.

"Jesus, Nick, I never expected it to happen so fast!"

"Me neither, but that screw is all right. When he goes after something he don't give up. Come on over here. This is where I work."

He led me to a homemade barber chair, similar to the kind I had become familiar with in the Death House.

"Easy job," Nick explained. "Two shaves a week for the shop. Wednesdays and Saturdays. Half a day's work each time. Resta the time I just hang around. Haircuts once a month. One day's work. Nothin to it."

I told him I had been moved into the East Hall.

"The hack put me in the mess-hall company until there's an

opening in the weave-shop company. Nice guy. He's rushing through an order of smokes for me. Which reminds me, Nick, about coffee and milk for the yard . . ."

Nick cut me short.

"Ain't bad, the mess-hall company. You'll be outa your cell more than the resta us. An don't say 'hack.' Up here all hacks are screws. 'Hack' is strictly Sing Sing slang. It's screw in all the cans. All over the country. An the one inna East Hall ain't bad — for a screw. Ya gotta watch him though."

Lefty came over to shake hands. It was his and Nick's way of showing the cons who were watching that I was a friend, that I was accepted, and that I was to rate the same amount and kind of respect that was due them.

"Wadda ya think, Lefty, the kid's got ol Binto's cell inna mess-hall company!"

Lefty said, "Good deal. You got yourself a clean cell."

I explained how clean it really was and, remembering again the cigarettes that would be waiting for me, I got back to the thing that was on my mind.

"Look, I have some money and I'd like to know about getting coffee, milk, and sugar and whatever else I'm supposed to get, for the court."

"What the hell ya worried about?" Nick wanted to know. "We got enough out there now. When commissary day comes around we'll all get together, figure out what we need, how much we need, an each guy'll get what he can. That's all. . . . You hold onta your few bucks, ya got a lotta time ta do!"

"Stop worrying about it," Lefty said. "Every court is like a family. We chip in whatever we can and it's share and share alike. Meantime, I'd better get back to my machine, Sailor's been looking after it for me."

THIRTEEN

THAT EVENING SAILOR CAME UP TO THE COURT FOR COFFEE. THIS meant a great deal to me. My social status in prison would be undergoing another change. A minor change, but an important one. Sailor represented a court. I had now been accepted by two courts. It was inevitable that others would follow since my new-found friends and Sailor and his friends had many friends who had friends who had friends.

Being the rightest guy in the world doesn't mean a thing if you have no friends in prison. They will keep away from you — even those who might want to be friends. Cons will warm up only to those cons who are vouched for. It's a vicious pattern which can be broken only by a gesture of friendship such as had been made to me.

Sailor was a needle man in the weave shop. Whenever a warp thread wore through a needle, breaking the eye, it was Sailor who replaced and rethreaded the needle. He took care of all the looms in shop Number 2 and his job was considered a soft one. Not many needles broke and the ones that did were generally replaced by the man operating the loom. This was especially true if the operator and Sailor were friends — and Sailor was friends with everyone. As his name implied, he had spent the greater part of his thirty-odd years of life at sea. When he found out that I, too, had been to sea we became fast friends. Sailor's teeth were bad and he chewed tobacco all day. He had an antipathy to cleanliness. His stories about ships, places, and women were wonderful even at the fourth and fifth tellings.

When I met him Sailor had already served eleven years of a

twenty-year to life sentence. He was in for second-degree murder. "A real jerk, that's what I was," he explained one day. "Anybody who even looks at a gun is a jerk! Do ya know how stupid it is? Put a gun in ya pocket and you're walkin around wit seven years. That's all! Just puttin it in ya pocket! Only a jerk would do a thing like that. A real jerk!"

In the shop, Sailor appointed himself my guardian and instructor. The shop guard, with rare perception and some encouragement from Nick, assigned me to Lefty's machine on which I was to learn how to weave towels.

Lefty was supposed to show me how, but because he, too, enjoyed Sailor's stories he urged the latter to take over. Practically all of his eleven years in Dannemora had been served by Sailor in the weave shop. At one time or another he had operated every loom in the shop. He knew each one intimately.

"Look here, kid, ya see how this kicker hits the shuttle? The shoe over here was replaced five, six years ago an it's a little outa line, that's why ya get that funny twistin motion. Right?" In deference to Lefty's status as operator, Sailor always sought his confirmation. After Lefty nodded, Sailor would continue. "Now watch the shuttle. See?" He'd start the machine and point each step of the way. "When she hits that way, this end goes out. The shuttle don't go onna straight line. Ya gotta watch that. Hot days when the moisture inna warp is dried out, the threads don't separate easy, then, bango! Ya shuttle goes flyin out. Ya gotta be careful then, ya kin get hurt. Right, Lefty?"

"That's right. Red, over on 37 machine, got three stitches in his head that way. Lucky."

Extracurricular instruction overlapped and in time became part of regular instruction.

"Ya see that hobbin boy? Keep away from him. He's no good. Right?"

Lefty thought so too. I made a mental note to steer clear of that particular hobbin boy.

"Joe? I dunno.⁴ A few things been said about him, but I dunno. Main thing is, he minds his own business. Ya know in a place like this there's too goddam many rumors floatin around. The cons are like a buncha ol women — got nothin else ta do so they tear every-

body apart. Ya don't know what the hell's true an I rather not pay attention unless I know. Right?"

Right!

"Hey, Lefty, did ya tell the kid about that sonofabitch yestaday?"

"No. I didn't think it was important."

"Well, I think he should know so he gets an idea how rumors get aroun. Right?"

"I suppose it's a good idea. . . ."

Sailor turned to me. "This guy comes over ta me an Lefty ta tell us he heard ya got in a fight over a screw. Takin the screw's part. Right?"

"Who, me?" was the best I could think of.

"Yeah, you."

"But I've been here only a few days and you know I haven't had any fights!"

"Yeah. That's what we figgered. This was supposed to've happened inna reception company."

I thought back to the reception company. Positively no fight!

Not even an argument.

"Who told you this?"

"What's a difference? We gottim straightened out an that's the end of it. I just wanted ta show ya how quick a rumor gets aroun this rathole."

"Allright. But why me?"

"Kid, it ain't nuthin. Don't worry about it. Maybe somebody didn't like the way ya comb ya hair, that's all!"

"I don't get it though. I don't know anyone in here — except you guys — so who the hell would want to louse me up?"

"I don't know. There's no point in tryin ta trace it so forget about it. Right?"

Lefty agreed.

I couldn't forget it. Taking a screw's part. Doing a screw's fighting for him, arguing in favor of a screw, even making a kind statement about a screw, was a serious charge against any convict. I worried in spite of the fact that my friends had taken care of the business in their own way.

I went back to the precise moment I was locked into 25-24, remembering, reliving every minute from then on. The only unpleas-

ant incident was when the bug began raving about the psychiatrist. But there was no fight. No argument. My explanation had been resented but that was all. No more, no less.

"Look," I said to Sailor and Lefty, "the only thing I can remember happened the other day when a nut started to rave to me about the bug doctor accusing him of laying his mother. I told him it wasn't meant that way — the doctor asked him if he had much intercourse with his mother and that could mean anything. Anyway, he didn't like it and that was all."

"I don't know what you're worrying about." Lefty spoke earnestly. "It's all over. Forget the whole thing."

Sailor felt otherwise. "Was anyone standin near when this come off?"

"Sure! Half the company was on the gallery by the time I got there. . . ."

"That's it! That's it! Ya see how a thing can get spread an blown up? That's just what I was tryin ta point out ta ya! Somebody heard the whole thing an started talkin. Maybe just makin conversation. Then the next guy adds to it an the guy after him stretches a little an there ya are!"

Lefty repeated, "Forget about it. Everything is straightened out. Somebody started a rumor and it almost got out of hand. Let it be a lesson. Never say a screw is all right to anyone you don't know. Even if you know a screw is all right — and there are some who are better men than the guys who set themselves up as super-right guys — you don't talk about it except to your friends. Even then it's better to not say anything."

It made no difference that the psychiatrist was not a guard. To all convicts, guard and prison worker spell out the same thing — Law. And Law is the enemy. Law is the thing to hate, to blame for your troubles, your misery, your unhappiness.

During the years in Dannemora I saw so much injustice perpetrated by both officials and convicts that my own values underwent a change. Its authority and its executors assumed the form of a genuine menace. This was the enemy to watch, to protect myself against. This was the evil to fight, to reject, to keep clear of. This was the ugliness to erase. To do all this, other values had to change. The concept of fair play had to be discarded as dangerous to my

own existence. I had to learn that the most effective way to fight injustice was to use its own weapons. Lies, deceit, brutality replaced their opposites as the true virtues, and were directed against all who, in any way, were identified with authority.

It was the only way, I thought, to survive.

FOURTEEN

SAILOR LOVED TO TALK ABOUT HIS CAMPAIGNS WITH WOMEN. "YA ever been ta Rosario?" he'd ask me, then for Lefty's edification, "It's the real port for Buenos Aires. Better than B.A. Lively. A real sailor's town. Right?"

Whenever the conversation tacked seaward, he would look to me for confirmation of any statement he made even though, many times, I'd tell him beforehand that I had never been to this or that place. Sailor never paid attention. As far as he was concerned, I was a sailor and I knew — regardless.

"Well, I was workin the Grace Line at the time. Bosun. The first time I go ashore, I pick up this beautiful dame about thirty, thirty-five. Looked ta be half Indian . . ."

Lefty and I both enjoyed his stories and his women.

One day Sailor started a story, stopped suddenly halfway through, brooded a minute, then said, "Ya know, it's funny how a guy'll get ta figure it's all right fa him ta do a thing but n.g. fa anybody else. That's me, a genuine, eighteen-carat jerk! Ya think I ever went out with chippies? Not me! I was too smart. I had it all figured. I never liked guys who went out with young stuff just ta turn it over. Me, I figured a dame is got only one thing ta offer a husband and if ya take that away from her she's sunk. But ya take a married woman, she already gave it ta the husband an he's got nothin ta lose if she plays aroun a little. Right? That's why my meat was always married. I never went out with anythin else — not even a whore.

"Then what happens? I come home fa a couple weeks an the first thing I start hearin is that my kid sister is playin aroun with some guy. So, big shot me, I follow her, see her go up a furnished-

room joint, an I know some sonofabitch loused her up good. Now mind ya, I got nothin against anybody fa goin out afta a piece, long as nobody is gonna be hurt by it. That's why I stuck ta married stuff, like I told ya. But here, I figured the kid is all loused up, she'll never get a husband, she'll turn out a tramp, you know. So I get myself a good rod, a beaut of a .45, an I go up one evenin when I know they're together.

"Now here again, all I wanted ta do was crash in an have a talk with the guy. All I wanted was ta show him it'd be healthier fa him ta marry the kid. But what happens? I crash in, an there they are, goin away at it a mile a minute! That's all, brother! I start blazin away at the guy, the kid starts screamin, the joint is like a mad-house, an the next thing I know I'm inna Raymond Street jail with a murder rap on me."

Silently, Lefty and I sympathized.

"Ya know," Sailor went on sadly, "I wouldn't mind doin the time an everythin only I found out later that the kid an the guy were married. . . ."

When Sailor left us to replace a needle on another machine, Lefty said, "He told me the story before. It was a tough break for him, but it was his own fault. He'll be the first one to point out that it was a tougher break on his brother-in-law. It took him a long time to learn it's stupid to jump to conclusions. Sure, we all agree it's stupid, we all talk about it but we don't really understand how stupid it is until we're caught in that very stupidity."

I thought that one over while I fed the loom a fresh bobbin.

FIFTEEN

LEARNING TO OPERATE A LOOM WAS A CINCH. IN A FEW DAYS I was weaving toweling as expertly as any old-timer. I had learned how to stop the machine at the precise moment when the bobbin was unraveled. I learned how to take the used bobbin out, slip a fresh one over the spindle, take up the end of the old thread, knot it to the end of the fresh thread, and start the loom again, in one easy operation and quicker than it takes to describe.

I learned, too, that fresh bobbins, waiting their turn to be used, should be dampened — not too much, not too little — else the whole roll of thread would be jarred loose and come off when the shuttle hit against the kickers.

Then there was the delicate operation of balancing the weights that held the warp taut. Learning that took longer because the operator had first to get the exact feel of his machine. It was an important thing to know. I learned that if the warp was too tight the toweling would be thin and the loom's output cut down. On the other hand, if the warp was too loose the toweling would be too heavy — rippled — and the machine's output even less.

Output is important when the operator is being paid three cents for every ten yards he weaves.

All machines are geared to the same speed. They have a maximum capacity beyond which no amount of oiling or scheming or conniving can get. If the breaks are with a man, if his machine does not break down, if no needles split, if fresh bobbins are delivered regularly, and if he works steadily all day every day, he can earn as much as three dollars at the end of the week.

Most inmates have no outside income to supplement their prison

earnings. Their jobs are a source of constant anxiety to them. Even the men who receive two or three or five dollars a month from home feel the pressure of economics. Coffee, milk, sugar, tobacco cost money and the only way to get money in prison is to work for it — unless an outside mob is contributing in a very fancy way.

So the machines in the weave shops, in the cotton shops, in the tailor shops are kept humming and clacking and buzzing. The towel-eling and mattress ticking, the shirt goods and pants goods keep building larger and larger rolls under the machines. Storage spaces are jammed with the goods and a new record is established.

The Dannemora shops could and did produce one million five hundred thousand yards of material in one year.

Even while it is being produced the material is being converted into sheets and pillowcases for New York State prisons and hospitals. It is being converted into regulation coats and trousers for convicts in Sing Sing, in Auburn, in Great Meadows, and in our own Dannemora. It is being converted into mattress covers and towels, into shirts and underwear, filling out orders received from other prisons, from insane asylums, from hospitals.

One of the more popular and completely erroneous conceptions is that a thief steals because he is too lazy to work. There is less work involved in wielding a pick and shovel, or in operating a high-precision lathe, than in planning and executing a trifling robbery, and a man who has committed himself to a life of crime is forever planning, forever scheming, forever absorbed with the thought of his next crime.

He steals mainly because his environment has conditioned him into an acceptance of crime as a means of earning a living. He steals because in the stealing he finds a satisfactory symbol for rejection of socially accepted values, systems of morality, patterns of behavior. He steals because he resents the suggestion that he might earn a steady income out of eight hours' work a day behind a desk or beside a machine. He steals because he insists that his life will not be regulated by the clock or the machine.

So he steals, and in the stealing, works infinitely harder than he would at any honest job. He works harder and he earns less than he would at any legitimate job. He works harder in a hopeless, desperate fashion, for he knows, he knows, that sooner or later the police, the Law, will catch up with him. He knows that sooner or

later he will be sent to prison. But he does not know that in prison the whole of his life, every second, every minute, every hour, will be synchronized to the things he loathes most — the clock and the machine.

My second evening in the East Hall was marked by a visit from the affable officer in charge.

"How're you doing?"

"Fine!"

"Get your cigarettes all right?"

I offered him one, thanking him for the favor.

"That's all right. Any time I can help, let me know. Which reminds me, you still have no locker. I'll tell the gallery man to pick one up for you from an empty cell. They're handy. You'll have a place to keep your stuff in."

I thanked him again and again he assured me that he considered it part of his job to do all he could for the boys in his hall.

"There aren't many lockers around and they're not easy to get, but Zappy . . . You know Zappy? He's your gallery man. He'll find one for you. Throw him a couple of packs of butts and he'll do anything for you."

Two packs of cigarettes? That was cheap. I started to hand them over.

"No, no. Give them to Zappy. I'll send him around later and you tell him what you want in the way of a locker. Best thing to have in your cell, no two ways about it! Get yourself a good lock and you can keep anything in it. Clothes, groceries, and if you got a stove keep that in it too. Which reminds me. Did you get fixed up with one yet? No? Well. I think I can get one for you but I'm warning you now it'll cost about four cartons. That's what they charge for them in Sears Roebuck. . . ."

"That's okay with me. I'd certainly appreciate getting a stove, but how about getting fused up? And, you know, taking a chance on getting locked up?"

"What are you worrying about things like that? Throw Zappy a pack and he'll fuse you up in no time. Far as getting locked up, just don't cook in front of a screw, that's all. And I tip the boys off when the hall is going to be frisked."

"Well, that's fine. I'll put in an order whenever you say. . . ."

"Make one out right now. Give it to me and tomorrow you will have your boiler. By the way, if you need extra coffee or milk or sugar, I can get you the State stuff. It's cheaper and just as good as anything you get in the commissary."

We got down to business, determining what and how much I needed in the way of groceries, how much I would save on the transaction, and how much my budget would stand.

The commissary slip I made out was for six cartons.

A square-jawed, desperate-looking Italian came to my cell door that evening and announced:

"I'ma Zappy. The screw he tella me you wanna locka. I gotta for you. Here, you taka this!"

He shoved two narrow tin boxes through the cell gate. One contained coffee, which I poured into my cup. The other was packed with spaghetti and meat balls.

"Here, I bringa fork too. Eata right outa the box — tomorra I bringa plate. You gotta lotta time?"

"Life. . . ."

"Atsa too bad. Me, I gotta twenny to life myself. Gotta fifteen years finish already. You killa somebody?"

I wanted to talk about it but my friends' coaching had taken. I merely nodded.

"Atsa too bad! Well, atsa way the life goes. Issa good, the spaghetti?"

"Sure is! I haven't had spaghetti like this since I don't know when."

"Atsa good. I maka myself. Froma where you come?"

"East Side. Sixteenth Street."

"You knowa Mott Street?"

I knew Mott Street. He talked about the Café Russo Diavolo, the little church on Kenmare Street, the "scungilla place onna Mott, downstair. My friend Tony the Hoss owna. You know Joe White? Mario?"

I kept shaking my head and eating spaghetti. No special contacts. Nothing in common.

"Well, atsa before you time. Alla good men! You lika the spaghetti, hah? I make two, three time every week. You wanna, you letta me know. Tomorra I bringa you locka. I gotta buy. Maybe

two, three pack — I dunno. Thissa place fulla sonamabitch! *Sbirri!* Fulla them!”

Zappy’s version was that Dannemora, and the East Hall in particular, was infested with *sbirri*. With rats.

“Itsa no more like inna old day. Whena I come in here inna 1917, alla good men in here. No *sbirri!* Men alla have *coglioni!* Like this!”

He held his hands out as though holding a couple of basketballs.

“Now, no more! The whole place fulla dog, rat, punk!”

He shook his head, remembering the good old days when men were men and everyone was equipped with oversized testicles.

“Itsa no good now. Everybody lika screw now. Lika woman. Itsa no good!” He made a spitting sound which expressed the contempt he had for the new breed of convict.

“I tella you this because you nice kid. I lika you. You keepa you nose clean! Keepa far froma these sonamabitch anda you be alla right. You fini with the spaghet? Good! Tomorra I bringa you the locka. I tella you now, I don’t know how much is gonna be — two, three pack, maybe more! You wanna newspaper, magazine, you aska me. I take care. I lika you. I get anything you wanna in here!”

That sounded like a build-up.

I told Nick and Lefty about my visitors.

“It’s all right,” said Lefty, “just watch them. TI hand.”

Nick was more explicit. “Ya musta told them ya had dough. That’s the only reason they’re around. They’re figuring an angle to get in on the moola. As fa the Dago, he likes ta put on a grandstand act — makin a play fa every kid comes in here. But he’s harmless so don’t get all riled up. Don’t crack ta him, *I’ll* talk ta him! Be better that way. Ya can’t trust him. He’s been a screw’s man from way back an he can make things tough fa ya. All that crap about rats is his way a whitewashin himself. Let him get the locker and pay him what he asks — don’t take anythin from him. He won’t offer anythin anyway, after I talk ta him!”

Lefty’s silence was approval of Nick’s way of handling the affair.

After supper I found a roomy, solidly constructed locker fitted

neatly into the space between the foot of my bed and the cell wall. It was painted a pale gray-green — the exact shade as the rest of the cell. Lefty had said, "They work hand in hand," and it was easy to guess that Zappy had taken the locker out of the cell right after my predecessor moved out. It was just as easy to guess that Zappy and the hall keeper worked a side racket in lockers — to keep them in cigarettes. I burned, but "You don't fight City Hall!"

In the locker were several cans of milk and paper bags full of coffee and sugar — non-commissary brand. A four-cup coffee percolator sat on an electric stove — neither new but both in fine condition. I divided six cartons of cigarettes into the loot and came out with a fair return.

"How're things, Johnny?" The hall keeper looked pleased. "Everything okay?"

"Yes, sir! I certainly didn't expect to find all this!" I pointed to the open locker.

"Well, that's what I came up to see you about. I put the perc in with the rest of the stuff — you have to make coffee in something. . . . It's just a loan though. One of the boys downstairs had a couple and I asked him for this one for a few days. Meantime you can ask your folks to send you one or order one from Sears. Unless you'd like to hold onto this one. The guy'll sell it. Cheap. I think he wants four packs and that's not much for a good perc. If you want it that way, let me know. Be glad to do the favor."

Four packs equaled about fifty cents. Cheap. I knew it would never reach the imaginary "one of the boys," but fifty cents for a percolator was more than reasonable. The gallery man and the screw probably had a cellful of percs left by cons on their way home.

"This'll be fine, but you'll have to put in another order for me. . . ."

"Sure, sure, any time!"

Zappy came around after the water had been given out. "Howsa things? Everything okay?"

I gave him three packs of cigarettes for the locker. "Atsa too bad I canna get for nothing! I try, but the sonamabitch won't give. Everybody in this place issa businessman today. Sonamabitch!"

"That's all right, Zappy. Don't worry about it. Most of the guys in here don't get money from the outside — and what the hell can you do with two cents a day? It's tough!"

"I guessa you right. But issa all sonamabitch anyway! You maka the coffee yet? I puta the fuse inna you cell. Sixa amp. Issa enough for maka spaghet, steak, porka chop, anything! Ifa you wanta meat, you letta me know. I gotta one guy inna butcha shop he get anything an no aska too much."

The few dollars I had to my credit out in the front office made a big difference. Already, in the short time I had been in Danne-mora, I was being offered connections which ordinarily would have taken years of patient cultivation, conniving, and chicanery. I took up his offer. In exchange for one carton of cigarettes a week I would receive one dozen eggs, one pound of bacon, and "every day you getta some kinda meat — porka chop, steak, choppa meat. Okay? Anna maybe onion or potato. Okay?"

I wrote out another commissary order then and there.

Lefty, Nick, and Duke all agreed that I had gotten a good deal.

"Boy! You must be loaded!"

"I have only a few dollars, that's all. . . ."

"Makes no difference. The screw and Zappy think you're loaded or that you'll be taken care of for the rest of your bit an they wanna get in on it. Let em think that way. Meantime get all the grub you can!"

The grub came regularly. Eggs, bacon, chops, steaks, onions, potatoes, and frying grease. We ate like kings. Nick and Duke contributed items from home — Polish sausage, spaghetti and tomato paste, meat loaf such as only Duke's sister could prepare, and poppy-seed and cheese cake from Nick's mother.

Lefty received no packages. No money. No letters. It made no difference. He was one of us.

Zappy's attitude toward me underwent a subtle change after Nick had a quiet talk with him. Zap remained friendly and good-natured, but on a different level. He stopped being overfriendly, overgood-natured. I was one of the boys. I was with right guys who would not tolerate the slightest implication that they might not be right. Being with them, it followed that I must be right too.

Zappy was anxious to show he respected Nick and anyone who was Nick's friend.

"Any frienda Nick issa my friend. I know Nick lotsa year! Gooda guy. Atsa why I bringa you spaghetti anna coffee firsta night you here. Nick issa my friend longa time. Issa man an I respect man alla time! He treata me likea man an I treat him an hissa friend the same way. Me, I never fool aroun witha kids, witha punk. Me, I'm a man! Anybody fool aroun with punk issa punk himself!"

The accuracy of Zappy's final statement was demonstrated to me a few days later when I came upon him playing the amorous wife with a youngster locking on my gallery. However, food was all-important and as long as it was brought to my cell regularly and in adequate quantities Zappy was all right. Zappy would be tolerated. Zappy's wrongness and Zappy's freakishness would be overlooked in the name of bacon and steak.

I kept a generous supply of commissary slips on hand.

Food — even State food — tasted better when prepared and eaten outside the mess hall. There were days when Zap could bring no more than what we had already been served that afternoon. But heating it over, adding a pinch of pepper, a slice of onion, made all the difference between gagging at and relishing the very same meal.

When the first count was over every evening, when I had my stove plugged in and the coffee perking away, when the meat and vegetables were prepared and waiting for conversion into a palatable meal, was something I began to look forward to. I found solid satisfaction in cooking. My friends and I were living high.

After about a month of continual feasting I came into my cell one evening to find that my stove was gone. The coffee, milk, and sugar were there; the vegetables were there; the pot, the pan, the percolator were there — but no stove!

The first thing I thought of was that some bastard had sneaked into my cell to rob my stove.

The hall keeper came up, looking unhappy. "Hiya. I see you already got the bad news. . . ."

"What happened?"

"Just one of those things. Couldn't be helped. We had a surprise

frisk in the hall today. No one told me anything. Before I knew it a crew from the guard room was all over the hall. I tried to talk to the guy who found your stove but the sonofabitch wouldn't listen. Best I could do was talk him into forgetting your cell number. At least you won't be reported. . . ."

"Well, that's a break and I appreciate it. . . ."

"That's okay. I told you I'd look out for you. Wish I could've done better, but that's the way it goes."

"I know, I know. But now I'm stuck for supper."

"We can fix that up easy enough. I'll let you have my own stove for tonight." He turned to walk away, paused, and added, "If you want another stove, let me know. . . ."

I wanted another stove. While he was down at the desk getting his stove for me, I made out another special commissary order for cigarettes.

Four cartons. I had received a money order from home, supplementing the cash I had out front. But even at that I had to spend a lifetime in the place and I couldn't expect money orders that long. The price of the second stove I checked off to experience. I was determined, from then on, to carry the new stove with me wherever I went.

I used the hall keeper's stove two days and on the third day, when I marched into the hall for night lockup, he called me out of line to tell me I had a new stove in the cell. "If you want, you can give me a key to your locker so when there's another frisk I might be able to get your stove out of the cell before someone else finds it. Meantime, I hope you enjoy the new boiler and don't worry about anything!"

My new stove was the very same one that had been confiscated a few days before.

SIXTEEN

AFTER SIX MONTHS IN DANNEMORA, I BEGAN TO FEEL LIKE AN old-timer. I had friends, I had a court, and I knew my way around. I'd had four fights and two keep-locks for smoking out of bounds.

I played Duke's violin, tried to write poetry, and drew pictures every evening.

My violin playing was lousy and my rendition of "Kol Nidre" not nearly as popular as "Crying for the Carolines" and "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?"

My verse-making was unoriginal, uninspired, and unknown to anyone but myself.

Drawing was the most satisfying of my escapes. I drew pictures of trees and houses, pictures of boats and gulls, pictures of girls. I made squared or circled, oval or heart-shaped floral patterns on letterheads to serve as greeting cards — someone was always having a birthday or holiday or anniversary.

From cherished photographs I copied resemblances of mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, nephews, sons, daughters, wives, and sweethearts — everyone had those.

Since paints were not allowed in Dannemora, I made my own colors by unraveling State socks which came in three color combinations — red and gray, green and gray, and black and gray. I boiled the colored threads until all the dye had been cooked out — that's all. No evaporation or binding medium. The colored liquid was ready for immediate use and was equal in clarity and intensity to any pan or tube colors manufactured on the outside.

Word got around. Every day in the shop, in the yard — wherever we were permitted to mix and talk — someone would ask:

"Willya make a pitcha a the ol lady?" "My kid's birthday is next week, how's about a card?"

I ate it up. I promised to do more work than I was able to complete, but no one complained. Time was unimportant. The guys who needed pictures had a superabundance of time. The others, on the verge of freedom, had no need for pictures.

About this time I learned there was a con in Dannemora named Richard "Dollar Security" Rehm.

One evening, marching to our cells for the night lock-up, we were startled to see a slender man, sporting a bright green smock and beret, standing by an easel set up in front of the hall keeper's desk. An oversized oval palette rested on his left arm. Incongruous — in that setting. Defiant, too — daring anyone to do something about it.

The easel, the canvas, the palette, the paints and brushes were of special interest to me. A short time before, I had requested permission to get my own drawing materials and the request had been sharply denied — I might just as well have asked for permission to buy a machine gun. Here was a con who was allowed to have the very things I had asked for — and a great deal more. I felt discriminated against and burned up.

While we fed bobbins into our machines the next day Lefty told me the story of Richard Rehm.

"That was Rehm you saw last night in that freakish artist's get-up. Everyone in here calls him 'Dollar Security' and he's one of the worst lice in the place. A no-good bastard. I want that to sink in — a no-good bastard! I think he's doing fifteen to thirty for a heist — I'm not sure of that, but I am sure he's no good! You know I never mark anyone lousy, but Dollar Security deserves it."

By the time we knocked off for dinner I had learned that some five years earlier Richard Rehm had been committed to Dannemora. Young, apparently without family, and certainly without friends. In addition, a Hoosier — which in prison lingo meant that he hailed from some place other than New York City and therefore was not as bright, not as intelligent, not as courageous, not as hep as we city cons.

He got a job as gallery man in the South Hall. He found two or three other Hoosiers with whom he became friendly and after

a time they managed to get a tiny square of land which they converted into a court. The small group kept to itself. A point in their favor was that none of the group tried to force himself upon any of the city mobs who dominated the prison. The general attitude toward them was, "They're Hoosiers, but not bad. They mind their own business."

Rehm did his job as gallery man to the satisfaction of both the Administration and the inmates. He never became too friendly with anyone on his gallery. He kept the gallery clean, and he maintained a wary eye on it. Petty thefts dropped to a minimum and no one would think of accusing Rehm of any that did occur. For a Hoosier, there were remarkably few faults in him.

"We had a riot up here in '29." Lefty seemed to have forgotten about Rehm. "It was a beauty while it lasted. When it was over, some of the guys who started it and a lot of guys who had nothing to do with it but just happened to be handy were locked up. The South Hall was emptied out and those guys were transferred there. We were stripped of all privileges and the warden gave the screws the go-ahead sign.

"Everything had been taken out of our cells. There was just the bare floor, the walls, and the gate. When we were transferred, all our belongings were thrown into a bag and stored away. We were put into the cells with a suit of underwear, a pair of socks, a cotton shirt, cotton pants — nothing else. No handkerchief, no belt, no tobacco, no cigarettes, no matches. Nothing."

The riot had taken place in the early fall when the weather was still mild, but by the time the South Hall was filled with what the officials claimed were the ringleaders and active participants, it was wintertime.

Lefty thought that in the beginning things were not too bad. "Every man that was sent into the South Hall got a beating as a matter of routine. They let each guy have a cell cup into which all his food was dumped — all at once, coffee, meat, potatoes, whatever it might be. But a guy was able to get used to that and manage to get by. A guy could get used to sleeping on a slate floor, without a blanket. A guy could get used to leaning and crapping on the floor and living with it until the hall screw decided to flush it out. A guy could get used to a lot of things."

A strong-arm squad was organized. All the guards were encour-

aged to join and many of them took advantage of the invitation by volunteering their services during off-duty hours.

"Getting a workout became a regular feature," Lefty swore. "The strong-arm squad was on duty twenty-four hours a day, and their favorite hours were when we slept. Sometimes they'd pick only three or four guys out of the whole hall. Sometimes they'd elect to work over a whole gallery."

The classic method was employed. The selected con would be roused by the glare of strong lights. He'd be ordered out of his cell and when, still half asleep, he stumbled out, he'd be punched awake by the waiting guards. He then would be taken to the back of the hall where the guards had more room to operate. There the workout would take place.

"Sure they used clubs!" Lefty answered my question. "But not too much. It was mostly punching and kicking. After a while you got smart and didn't fight back. Let the bastards knock you out quickly and that would be the end of it until the next time. The strong-arm boys loved the guys who fought back. Then they felt justified in doing a really thorough job — drawing it out, working up a sweat."

Beatings became routine. Now and then a con might be hurt more than had been intended and he would be carried out to the hospital. The other cons envied him. He rarely returned to the South Hall. Usually prison privileges were restored to him, he would be given a job, and if he kept his mouth shut, if in his letters home he did not complain, he was permitted to exist like the rest of the inmates who had not been sent to the South Hall.

If he complained to his friends or his family, the Administration's solution was simple and swift. More South Hall and more beatings, and if that didn't work, the intransigent would be sent "across the wall" to the Hospital for the Criminally Insane. There, all his complaints could be officially and scientifically dismissed.

For about six weeks the only inmates in the South Hall were the ones being punished. Their food was distributed by the guards, and the hall was policed by the guards. When the Administration had isolated all inmates designated as rioters, instigators, troublemakers, the front office staffed the hall with a picked crew of cons. One of them was Rehm.

"He took care of my company," Lefty said. "He gave us our

water, swept the gallery, dished out our food — three times a day. The only thing that could be said against him at that time was, he took the job. But then we figured he was a Hoosier and didn't know better. He wouldn't pass any messages and was afraid to talk to the guys locked up. He did just what the screws told him to do.

"Of course," Lefty conceded, "there wasn't a hell of a lot he could do at that time. All the gallery men in the South Hall were isolated from the rest of the prison themselves. They ate their meals in the hall, they bathed in the hall, and they got their haircuts and shaves in the hall. Even their buckets were taken out and emptied for them. The only thing they were exempt from were the workouts."

The workouts were becoming systematized. Every twenty-four hours a given number of men were arbitrarily selected, ordered out of their cells, and beaten into insensibility. A few guards refused to participate, but the rest considered the workouts as good exercise. Winter set in, the new year, 1930, came, and conditions in the South Hall became worse.

"Sure! An investigating committee came up from Albany. The commissioner of correction came up. Even some of the governor's staff came up." Lefty grinned. "They came up to the warden's house, had a big feed, were told that everything was under control, and they went back to Albany to write out long reports and issue optimistic statements to the newspapers. In the meantime, some eager bastard figured out a new wrinkle for cleaning out our cells. . . ."

"Every morning after breakfast all the windows in the South Hall would be opened wide to let in the freezing air. A squad of guards, manning the fire hose, would then go from cell to cell, directing the stream of icy water into each, washing it out, flushing it out — and drenching the man in it. It was a quick, and possibly more practical, method, but it was rough on the men in the cells. Beaten, soaked to the skin every day in freezing weather, they gave way to colds, grippe, pneumonia."

"Some were taken to the hospital, some were transferred back to their old cells and given their old job. Some died. The daily cell cleaning continued and Rehm became the official window opener. We cursed and threatened but all he'd say was that the screws ordered him to do it. Well, maybe so. But the other gallery men

refused. I heard them! And some of them were known to be out-and-out rats."

Some were taken to the hospital and some died. Then more died. One morning the windows were not opened wide. The cells were not flushed. That morning the gallery men distributed buckets — one in front of each cell. The gates were opened and the men told that from then on they were to use the buckets. It was like a holiday. A picnic. The next day beds, mattresses, and blankets were installed in the cells. But it was no amnesty. Punishment continued — on a different level. No writing privileges. No newspapers. No magazines. No radio. No commissary. No visits. Worst of all, no tobacco.

The beatings continued according to the caprice or inner need of any one of the guards working in Dannemora. It might be noon or midnight, it might be four o'clock in the afternoon or two-thirty in the morning, the sound of the strong-arm squad's heavy footsteps, the scuffle of the preliminary pummeling, and the frightened cry of a man just before he is knocked unconscious, were commonplace to the isolated cons in the South Hall.

Lefty philosophized, "You know, Johnny, it's a strange thing, but a man that's a rat, a stool pigeon, doesn't squeal because he loves or respects the Law. I have an idea that people who do that hate the Law more than the right guys who spend their lives breaking the Law and fighting the Law. I figure that rats and stool pigeons are weaklings, one way or another. They're full of fear. They find themselves in a position where the fear gets the best of them and they do things that they know are wrong. It may sound funny, coming from me, but I think I understand guys like that. I feel I know what makes them tick. They're like a guy that's full of hate. They're scared."

Rehm was not a rat in the sense that he squealed on anyone, though it was generally felt that he would not hesitate to do so. There was a malice, a viciousness in his attitude toward the other convicts. He enjoyed opening the South Hall windows as wide as they would go. He enjoyed doling out the food, slopping it into the cups, deliberately letting it drip over cell gates and floors. He enjoyed watching the strong-arm squad in action.

"After a couple of months," Lefty said, "restrictions against gallery men leaving the hall were lifted. They were allowed to go to

the other halls, to the yard, to the mess hall, to the chapel — anywhere the rest of the cons outside the South Hall could go. Once that started, the tobacco situation was not as frantic as it had been. All the gallery men were bringing in State tobacco and even tailor-made cigarettes for us. Not as much as we might want, but enough to keep us from blowing our tops. Sure, the screws knew about it but there wasn't much they could do except to catch us with smokes on us. Our friends out in population took care of us, sending in as much as they could, and the gallery men were pretty decent about taking chances to pass the smokes in to us — getting caught meant getting a shellacking and being locked up with the rest of us. But most of them took the chance, brought the smokes in, and won the respect and friendship of all the cons in the place.

"Rehm made passes too. He sneaked tobacco and matches into the hall, allright! But the sonofabitch wouldn't do it unless he was paid for it. Anyone on his gallery that wanted tobacco sent in had to first write a note to his friends in population asking them for smokes — and coffee, milk, sugar, peanut butter, cakes. Anything that could be bought in the commissary. If they didn't have the dough, well, old Rehm would take a watch or fountain pen. Maybe even a pair of new shoes or an outside shirt or underwear or socks, anything! Sure, he'd bring in State tobacco for us. He'd also bring food and clothing in for himself!"

How did he do it? The men in the South Hall and their friends were not the types to be bullied into paying tributes — particularly to a Hoosier.

Rehm's method was so uncomplicated that, until the South Hall was opened again, no one could honestly say that he was not trustworthy.

He simply looked up friends of men isolated on his gallery and gave them a note asking for tobacco, or relayed a verbal message requesting the same. He then would inform the friend that, occasionally, he was able to sneak a sandwich or cup of coffee to the man locked up. Of course he could not do this too often — not while making five cents a day. . . . The friend always understood and the following commissary order would be given to Rehm with instructions to take care of the friend — and himself. It was as easy as that. The man who was locked up never knew that his friends were sending anything but State tobacco and the friends had no

way of finding out that Rehm was keeping the commissary packages for himself. Finding that the initial scheme worked so effortlessly, he branched out. He began asking friends for watches, for fountain pens, for outside clothing, for anything valuable allowed in the prison. "Your friend needs it — he told me to ask you." The friend always gave, and the friend never received.

"There were rumors." Lefty waved his hand. "Plenty of rumors. But that's all they were. Rumors. When you're desperate for help or desperate to help, you've got to discount rumors, you've got to pretend they don't exist. There were rumors that Rehm was as wrong as they make them, that he was clipping guys for part of the stuff being sent to them, that he was a fairy. But there were no facts. You might believe he was wrong. You might believe he was queer. You might believe he was holding out on you. But you couldn't know, and as long as you couldn't know you had to go along with him. You had to hope for the best. Somebody hung the name 'Dollar Security' on him. It was half joke and half serious and since he didn't seem to mind we became more uncertain than ever. Anyway, Dollar Security Rehm did real well for himself — for about eighteen months."

The South Hall was opened up again. The rioters were restored to the prison population. Prison privileges were returned to each man. The rumors about Dollar Security crystallized into facts. Friend asked friend whether the things he had sent were received. Friend asked friend why things had not been sent. Friends argued about these things. Friends talked about them. Friends came to conclusions and all the conclusions pointed the finger at Dollar Security.

A friend decided it was about time to do something about Rehm and only the alertness of a nearby guard kept Dollar Security from being liquidated on the spot. Around 1931, he was put into protective custody.

Protective custody was a gallery on the flats of the East Hall, in front of and in full view of the hall keeper's desk. It was the gallery which housed all the men in the prison who, for one reason or another, had incurred the hatred of some con or cons in population. It was a gallery of rats. It was a gallery of men who walked with shame. It was a gallery of convicts marked for death by their fellow cons. It was the gallery where Rehm locked when I first saw him, standing in front of the new studio easel.

Things began to happen to the large canvas by the hall keeper's desk. Every evening its surface would show a change, a development toward the realization of an idea. First a careful outline drawing in charcoal; then unrelated patches of color — a pale blue, followed by patches of darker blue. Then still darker blues. Planes became defined. Subsidiary forms made themselves felt and an over-all form grew out of the canvas, took shape, became recognizable as a delineation of the *Blue Boy*.

The only disturbing feature about it was the painter's insistence upon using blue tones to the exclusion of all other color. Evidently Rehm felt that Gainsborough had perpetrated a hoax when he titled the original *Blue Boy*. Dollar Security was going to expose the old master and do the *Blue Boy* as it should have been done in the first place — in blue. In Prussian blue.

He worked away at it every day, fussing with a tone, a shade, a tint, oblivious of the remarks we made every time we passed, marching into our cells.

The first words I said directly to Rehm were, "Get away from my cell, you sonofabitch!"

He had appeared in front of my cell gate after we'd been locked in for the night. Lefty's story about Dollar Security had made its intended impression — I wanted no part of him. Even after he explained that he'd heard I was interested in drawing and painting and all he wanted was to let me have whatever materials I might want. He had a superabundance of stuff.

I cursed him again and he smiled and disappeared. I was in a rage. I knew that all the gallery and hall men were out, doing their jobs. I knew that more than one had seen Rehm standing by my gate. And I knew that at that very moment the word was spreading: "Dolla Security was upta the kid's cell. . . ."

I thought that the only way to kill the rumor was to sneak down to the protection company, first thing in the morning, and punch his head in for him.

Lefty thought differently. Next morning, while we were lining up for mess hall, I told him what had happened and what I planned to do about it.

"You're all wrong, Johnny. All wrong. I've a lot more reason than you to dislike the bum, but as far as what happened last night,

you're way off base. You chased the guy when all he wanted was to offer you something!"

Nick felt the same way and, when Duke was told about it that evening, his opinion agreed with Nick's and Lefty's.

"There's no talk about it. There's no rumors. Forget about the whole thing, and don't make an issue of it!"

But there was no escaping an involvement with Dollar Security. One day Duke came up to the court with a pale-haired, pale-eyed man of about forty-five. Nick, Lefty, and Sailor — who was having coffee with us — greeted the newcomer warmly.

I knew he was a friend or at least an all-right guy when Nick invited him to have coffee with us.

He was introduced to me as Whitey Curtis. I could not make my mind up whether to like him or not. His handshake, his nod, his "Hiya?" were almost apologetic. There was something too shy, too retiring for a seasoned old-timer.

He had, obviously, spoken to my friends before coming up to visit with us.

Nick said, "Whitey is an artist too. He got somethin ta ask ya." Between sips of coffee Whitey explained the reason for his call.

"Not a artis, Johnny, Ah'm a sign painta." He spoke with his lips drawn back, uncovering a half dozen worn, tobacco-stained snags set haphazardly into his jaws. "A good sign painta. Masta mechanic. An a union memba in good standin. Partna with Duke Wellington. . . ."

I had never heard of Duke Wellington.

"Why, he's the best sign painta inna country. Take it from me! An a good guy. Any guy meetin the Parole Board needin a job, ol Duke'll giveim one on my say-so."

He looked to Lefty, Nick, and Duke. They nodded, agreeing that Wellington was a grand guy.

"See? Ask anybody! But ta get back ta why Ah came here . . . Ah seen some a ya drawins. Pretty good. Take it from me! Anyway, Ah got an idea. Ya see, they're startin a school inna joint. Ya know, with classes. Anyway, Ah figure if Ah can get enough guys that wanna learn, Ah can get the warden ta lemme start a class. Ya know, sign paintin an posters. We can get the State ta buy brushes an paint an whatever else we need. Wadda ya say?"

"Well, it sounds good. But how the hell are you going to get the okay? They won't even let us buy drawing paper in here!"

"Don't worry about it. All Ah need is a list a guys who'll come ta the class. Ah got a angle — a sonofabitch with enough pull ta swing it — Dolla Security."

This proposition, I knew, had been discussed, analyzed, carefully thought out. Apparently using Rehm was legitimate. Apparently, too, he would be used in such a way that those going in on Whitey's scheme would be free of the stigma of association with a louse. Whitey was doing the necessary preliminary work for the acceptance of his idea. Polling and propagandizing. Getting the cons' reaction while explaining his plan and the reasons for it in such a way that no future objections would arise.

"Okay, Whitey, put me on the list and let me know when you get started."

"Good boy! Ah guarantee Ah'll make a good sign painta outa you. An don't worry about Dolla Security, he ain't gonna be connected with the class in no way — Ah promise ya that. Ah'll be honest." His look begged us to believe him. "Ah'm promisin the sonofabitch anythin right now. Ah gotta get him ta go out front ta speak up fa the class — an until he does that Ah promise him anythin! He's all gone on bein an artis an Ah got him so crapped up on it he'll do most anythin. Course, once Ah got the class, ol Dolla Security is in fa one big surprise!"

Rehm thought he would become an assistant teacher in the class. Rehm also thought Whitey would teach him the fundamentals of drawing and painting. Rehm hoped that being a teacher and friend of Whitey's would change his status in the prison. That the old hatreds would be forgotten. That he would be accepted — at least with minimum reservations.

"Ah'll be honest with ya. Ah got that guy so fulla crap about this whole deal, he don't know whether he's comin or goin. He won't wake up till the class is under way. The stupid sonofabitch oughta know better but he's so gone on this an stuff he can't see fa nothing. Lissen ta this! Ah swear on my mother, Ah ain't tellin a lie! Ya seen that paintin he's didd'n with? *Blue Boy*? Who do ya think 's doin it? Me! That's who's doin it! Yeah, Ah know. Ya see him pokin away at it every night an ya think he's the guy. But

what ya don't see is me workin on it every day. All he does is go over what Ah already done. An" — Whitey showed his fangs in a malicious grin — "Ah'm gettin fifty bucks fa the job! A halfa hundred! Ah swear Ah ain't lyin. An anotha funny thing. . . . Ya know this creep really thinks he's doin the paintin? Ah swear he does! He's already got his name signed ta it! An anotha thing. Ya know he's gonna exhibit it? That's right. He already got the Protestant buck ta write ta John Sloan about it!"

Whitey Curtis had a knack for fitting the truth into the framework of his schemes. The sign-painting class was organized — with or without Rehm's connivance. My friends thought it possible that Whitey had fabricated the whole story in order to whitewash himself for having painted the *Blue Boy* for Dollar Security, and for the more serious disgrace of having peddled his talent.

The Protestant minister did contact John Sloan and succeeded in interesting the painter in the prison school and its budding art class, which had become the by-product of the sign-painting class. The result was that a section of wall space at the Independent Artists of America exhibition, in the Armory in New York City, was set aside for showing the work being done by the convicts in Dan-nemora.

The *Blue Boy* was sent and hung and photographed and the photograph was printed in the center fold of the *New York Daily News*, along with a benign editorial comment about "Art in Little Siberia."

These things did not happen immediately. It was months after my meeting with Whitey Curtis before his plans began materializing. Bit by bit restrictions against art supplies were eased. Gradually we were permitted a wider choice of brushes, of colors, of drawing papers, of inks. In the beginning we were allowed only sign painters' brushes and colors. Then water colors became permissible. Then, after many requests, we got the green light on oils.

I attended Whitey's class for one half day every day. A system was worked out, permitting shop men to attend school without disrupting production. Shop men who wanted schooling were doubled up on machines. While one spent half the day in class the other operated the machine.

The director of education who had been appointed to Clinton Prison was a shy, slight man with a ready smile. He was the ideal

advocate of a radically new idea in New York State penological circles — that men who had committed anti-social acts had done so not out of innate, hereditary urges but rather out of a combination of distorted environmental values.

The idea, further developed, included the premise that men who had committed or were given to committing anti-social acts were not hopelessly lost to society. These men, it was claimed, could be salvaged, and the most effective method for accomplishing this, it was further claimed, would be an earnest, intelligent, sustained educational program.

Within a short time the Prof organized a prison school — in spite of a wholly inadequate operating budget and against a dismaying amount of opposition, official and inmate. He recruited teachers from the inmate population — men with high school and college educations, men who wanted to teach, and men who wanted soft jobs. He worked incessantly at getting qualified teachers and he succeeded in so aggravating the Department of Correction that two civilian instructors were appointed to his staff. He argued, he pleaded, he begged, he talked, he telephoned, he visited, and he got the things he wanted.

He got a whole floor of a shop building for his school. He got a library. He got textbooks and supplies. He got teachers and he got students. He got men who wanted to learn how to read and write. He got men who wanted grammar school diplomas and he got men who wanted high school diplomas. He got what he wanted in spite of all predictions that he would not get a thing.

The Administration was not happy about the school because it necessitated so many changes in shop schedules, so many reassignments of personnel, and because of the deeply felt conviction that prison was a place for punishment — not rehabilitation.

The inmates made it difficult for the Prof because of their suspicions of any offers of help from the Law.

Prof persisted. His school grew. Student enrollment increased steadily. The prejudices and suspicions died, and after a necessary reorganization the prison school boasted vocational training and academic departments headed by Prof's civilian assistants. He ran the administrative end of the school, he taught, he lectured, and he listened receptively to ideas and suggestions from anyone who cared to make them.

He was enthusiastic about exhibiting the paintings we were making. He sought out everyone who showed the least interest. He talked and he encouraged, and when the arrangements had been made he asked us to submit what we thought was our best work.

Whitey Curtis, Irish Connellan, Willie Samet, two or three others, and I brought our canvases to the Prof. The *Blue Boy* was already in his office, ready for shipping. When Willie and I protested that it was not an original work Prof nodded emphatically, smiled, and explained why it should be sent to the Independents' exhibit.

"First of all," he said, "the exhibition is the Reverend's baby. He's running himself ragged getting things cleared with everyone from the governor right on down the line, and he likes this." Prof's thumb flicked toward the *Blue Boy*. "Next, you fellows are forgetting that if it were not for the *Blue Boy* you would not have canvases of your own. Think that over. . . . We're going along without any protests mainly because we want to show the people in Albany that the money they've allocated for this school is producing positive results. Once we convince them of that, no one will be able to stop us from getting paints or brushes or canvas or anything we want for this school! Do you follow me?"

We followed him.

"I don't care how Rehm got his materials. I don't care who he bribed or who he hung to get them. He got them. And because he got the materials we got materials! That's the important thing."

The prison exhibit succeeded in spite of the *Blue Boy*. Willie's painting was found to be good enough to rate inclusion in Sidney Janis' book on American primitives, *They Taught Themselves*.

Edward Alden Jewell, art critic of the *New York Times*, felt that the prison section of the exhibition indicated enough talent to warrant a Sunday column appealing for funds and materials for us.

The Sloans thought enough of my painting to write me an encouraging letter out of which grew a correspondence that continued for many years — until Dolly Sloan's death.

Everyone was happy with the outcome of the exhibition. Particularly Rehm. He was aware that the *Daily News's* photograph of the *Blue Boy* was being discussed respectfully throughout the prison. He was aware, too, that the word throughout the prison

was that Whitey had done the painting. He did not think so. He knew it was not so. His attitude was, Whitey had helped him with the preliminary work — with the drawing, with the mixing of the paint, with the application of the color. That's all. The daily working over of what Whitey had already done, the finishing touches, were the measure of a man's creative ability, were what really counted. Rehm was certain he had produced an original and superior work, based on a theme mishandled by an old master.

He decided that he had achieved at least fame if not immortality, though the latter possibility was never completely rejected. In keeping with this view of himself, Rehm further decided that, as a man of distinction, a man set apart from the average, it was incumbent upon him to live in a manner consistent with his cultural elevation.

"He's got genius, all right!" Lefty said. "He's got genius for doing the wrong things. Did you hear about his latest? Well, he's hired the big shine, Candy, to keep his cell clean and empty his bucket, and he hired another shine to cook for him!"

"Wait a minute, Lefty! What do you mean, he hired Candy and another guy? I don't follow you there."

"Just what I say. He hired them. A cell valet and cook. Pays Candy ten bucks a month and the cook gets fifteen and meals."

I began laughing.

"Don't laugh! I know what I'm talking about. Candy started working yesterday and he's talking about it all over the place. Says he's a real important shot now. You'd think the bastard," — Lefty was unable to refer to Rehm in any other way — "you'd think the bastard would know better. He's got everything he could get in here and now he's ramming it up into the rest of us by hiring guys to do his cooking and cleaning."

"But, Lefty . . . Twenty-five dollars a month on two and a half cents a day? Doesn't make sense to me. . . ."

It dawned on Lefty that I had not been thoroughly briefed on Dollar Security.

"Twenty-five bucks a month is peanuts to that bastard. He's a millionaire. That's right! A millionaire — a real millionaire! Why, the screw that swindled you on the stove deal is making about a hundred a week on the bastard just on food! Twenty-five bucks a month! Peanuts!"

A millionaire. A real millionaire. "I don't get it, Lefty. You told me that, in the South Hall, Dollar Security was doing guys out of cigarettes and coffee, out of shirts and socks and fountain pens. Even if he got everything in the prison it wouldn't add up to a million dollars. It doesn't figure. . . ."

Lefty interrupted. "That's right. In the South Hall he didn't have a pretzel. It's only the past six months or so that he's got dough. This is no rumor, kid. I read about it in the Chicago papers, myself. The bastard's grandmother died and left him over a million dollars. Cash, real estate, and jewelry. The works."

Lefty thought about it for a moment.

"Peanuts!" He said it bitterly.

It was true. Richard Dollar Security Rehm was a millionaire. Nearly everyone in Dannemora had read newspaper accounts of his inheritance. Rehm himself explained in detail.

The idea of talking to a genuine, legitimate millionaire was too much for me. Besides, I wanted to check for myself. I called him over to my cell one evening.

"Are you doing any more painting?"

He got over his astonishment at not being abused. "Yeah, yeah. I'm gonna do the *Red Boy* this time. I forget who gave me the idea. Lawrence or Reynolds. Anyway, one of the Englishmen. Whitey is laying it out for me. Getting it started."

He switched, asking politely, "What are you doing now? Any new paintings? You know I got plenty of material. I told you before, any time you need paints, brushes, or canvas, let me know. You're welcome to them. . . ."

I couldn't thank him, but I did tell him I'd let him know if I needed anything. "You know," I said, "I can't figure out how the hell you got all the stuff in the first place. I tried to get the okay out front and I was run out of the warden's office!"

Rehm grinned sourly. "Connections. If you got enough money you got connections, and when you got connections you can get anything you want. Anything! Anything except a gun and I think if I put out enough I could get that too! Look, I know I'm not liked in here and it used to bother me, but now I don't give a damn. You'd be surprised at how many guys' opinions've changed because of a ham sandwich and a cup of coffee!"

His cynicism forced me to make my position clear.

"I can understand guys going for a ham sandwich and a cup of coffee regardless of cost. You did it yourself. But I think guys like that, and you especially, are no goddamned good. I wouldn't trust you as far as I can bend these bars."

Rehm laughed loud and long. "Believe me, it don't bother me any more!"

"Okay. We know where we stand now. You know, I've been hearing so much crap about your being a millionaire, I'd like to make sure for myself."

"Sure. Sure it's true. Look, I got to see a guy now, but I'll bring you some papers to prove it."

He came back in a few minutes with a large, thick envelope, which he handed to me.

"Read the stuff inside. Hold it until morning — I'll pick it up off your bed after you guys go to work."

The envelope contained numerous letters from a firm of Chicago lawyers and a photostatic copy of a will and testament. Dollar Security was, without question, a multimillionaire.

According to the itemized breakdown left him by his grandmother, he was worth very close to two million dollars in cash, jewelry, stocks, bonds, securities, and real estate. The lawyers' letters substantiated the legality of the clauses in the will and testament.

Rehm came to visit with me the following evening. "What do you think of it?"

"The point is, what do you think of it?"

"I think it's wonderful," he said. "I never expected a nickel from my family and this was a very nice surprise. A very nice surprise!"

"You're lucky all right. You got much time to do, yet?"

"Yeah. . . . Better than seven years. But I'm not worrying. These lawyers of mine are working on getting me out long before that. They say it's going to cost a lot, but what the hell, I've got more than enough money!"

Word got around that I was getting too friendly with Dollar Security. The fellows on the court were unhappy about the snowballing rumor. Nick and Duke thought I should chase Rehm immediately. Lefty surprised us all by feeling I had a right to talk to anyone.

A crisis was avoided and a decision was made for me when

Lefty expressed the opinion that "There's nothing wrong in talking to a louse. The wrong is in being one. The kid isn't hanging out with the bastard. He isn't eating with him. He's just talking with him about painting and about himself. Now what the hell is wrong with that?"

Nick and Duke had no effective answer. Lefty turned to me. "You don't discuss your case with him, do you? You don't discuss us? Or anything you hear or are told out here?"

I shook my head.

"Well, okay. Far as I'm concerned, you're not doing anything wrong. Just don't get too friendly with the bastard!"

Nick and Duke finally, reluctantly, agreed there was nothing wrong with discussing painting with a louse. They immediately set about squashing all opinion to the contrary.

Rehm's visits became a daily ritual. After the shop men were locked up for the night, after the gallery men had given out the water and made their passes, he'd show up with a tentative "Hiya!" He'd talk about painting, about painters, and about his dreams for himself.

He harbored a curious and interesting point of view about the function and limitation of the contemporary painter. "Everything's already been done. The old Greeks and Italians worked it all out — all the creative stuff. The best an artist can do today is elaborate on what the old-timers've already done."

About drawing, "Sure it's good to know how. But the artist today don't have to know how. Not with pantographs and picture projectors. In fact," he would rationalize, "it's better if the artist doesn't know how to draw. You can see for yourself that the most respected painters today are the primitives. . . ."

About himself. "I'll be getting out soon. My lawyers are working on the case now and they're shelling out like crazy. They'll get me out—I'm not worried about that! They stand to lose too much if they fail. Man! Walking out of this place is going to be some deal for me! Soon's I get back home I'm getting myself a studio, a model, and I'm going to knock myself out for the rest of my life!"

One night Rehm came up to my cell with his arms full of new canvas panels and sketch pads.

"I'm giving the easel to Whitey. I'm going home in the morning!

Got a wire from my lawyers today. Here, you take these — I'd like you to have them."

He passed the panels and pads into my cell. "Wait!" In his excitement he dropped a pad. "Wait, I got more! More! Here, you can use this, and this, and this . . ."

He began emptying his pockets of tubes of paint, brushes, charcoal pencils — even a jar of linseed oil.

The realization that he would be free the next day had made him nervous, jittery, impatient. Hurriedly he passed the painting materials in to my cell and was off with a final "Take it easy! And keep an eye on the newspapers — you'll be reading about me!"

Richard Dollar Security Rehm, ex-con millionaire, made the headlines all right. Not big headlines. Not sensational headlines. The best he could do was a short paragraph in the back pages of the Eastern newspapers less than a year after his release.

The word flashed through Dannemora.

"Did ya hear about Dolla Security?"

"Did ya see the *News*?"

"Did ya read the *Times* about the sonofabitch?"

"I'll send ya the *Telly* soon's I'm done with it. Look on page 12."

I got the paper from Lefty, who got it from Nick. Around the margins of page 1 Lefty had printed in bold letters over and over and over, "PAGE TWELVE."

The account was brief. It said that Dollar Security and his companion had been convicted of killing a sheriff who had tried to search a truck in which they were passengers. The truck was carrying bootleg alcohol. After a hot gun battle Rehm and his friend had been captured.

The meager headline read:

"Ex-Con Hanged in Texas."

SEVENTEEN

DURING THE FIRST MONTH I WAS IN DANNEMORA THREE THINGS happened to me.

A Spanish guy, locking on the other side of the hall, accumulated about two quarts of bedbug juice — an alleged vermin destroyer concocted of vegetable oil, detergent, and disinfectant. After the gallery men had been locked in for the night he unfolded about a dozen newspapers, poured the bedbug juice over them, and had himself a good, satisfying smoke. Immediately after the eight o'clock count he undressed, crawled into bed, covered himself with the oil-soaked paper, and tossed a lit match over it. By the time the guards, attracted by the smoke pouring out of his cell, opened the gate, the Spanish guy had burned to death.

All I knew about Tiptoes was that he was an old-timer just back with a life bit. He was known by all in the prison, respected, and regarded as a big shot. He got the celi next to mine. At the end of that same day, while we were lined up on the gallery waiting for the gates to open, he turned to me, smiling cheerfully, stuck his hand out, and said, "Wish me luck, kid, I'm finishing it up tonight." I didn't get it until the next morning when his body was carried out to the morgue. His mattress was so saturated with the blood that had pumped out of both his slashed wrists, it had to be destroyed.

Whitey was a quiet guy who operated a machine in Number 2 weave shop. He locked on the gallery above me. He ate everything given out for breakfast, marched back to the hall, but instead of going into his cell for his bucket, like everyone else, he hurried up to the top gallery, climbed up on the railing, and dived off — aiming accurately for the steampipe valve opposite my cell. His head

was splattered all over the flats when the guards covered what was left of Whitey.

I thought a lot about these three things. They showed me one way out — escape. Freedom from a lifetime behind bars. I tossed the idea around for a long time. For months and for years. The longer I thought about it the more tempting it was. Sometimes I would test it. I'd lie in bed, in the darkness, holding my breath until I could hear my heart struggling to perform one more beat, until the only sensation left was one of lightness, of easing off into sleep.

It could be done that way. I knew it. I knew I could do it.

But I couldn't do it. In the back of my mind I felt that it was a waste, a throwing away of a great possibility. Escape meant something different from death, though the two were related. Escape and death both meant getting out of Dannemora, but the former also meant living — it meant streets and cities and people. It meant everything that had meaning for me. Death was the end of the world.

I thought about it a lot. Death was tempting but escape was more so. My thinking finally resolved itself to the single proposition: I must get out of Dannemora.

There were two ways for me to get out of Dannemora — escape or death. Escape meant taking the chance of getting killed. Well, that was the other way out. Escape meant that if I was successful all the world was mine — if unsuccessful, I had nothing to lose, the world would be ended anyway.

Escape. Making a beat. That was all I thought of. That was all any of the cons thought of, spoke of, dreamed of. Escape, to the man in prison, presents a soluble problem. He is interested solely in transferring his physical self from one side of a wall to its other side. He wants to escape to his home, to his family, and he devotes all his time and all his energies to attaining that goal.

In the mind of the prisoner, making a beat or making a break involves a series of firmly rooted notions. A man who works himself into a position of trust, where he is assigned to a job outside the walls, does not escape, does not make a beat, if he should decide to abuse the trust placed in him by making off. All the cons approve and are happy for him, of course, but they feel he has

only sneaked off. They feel he was smart but not quite as trustworthy as he might have been.

Sneaking off is nothing special to brag about. Not like breaking out, when a man is really up against rough odds. When a man has to be clever and bold and daring. When success means respect and admiration.

Breaking out. That is the big theme. Breaking out pays off in a big way. Freedom — and a satisfying, gut-cleansing stroke against the Law.

In the past thirty years there has been only a single successful break out of Dannemora.

Weepy and the Little Mick.

The Little Mick was missed shortly after the prison count. The big siren was set off, warning the valley, down as far as Plattsburg and Fort Ticonderoga, that a convict was making a desperate lunge for freedom. Guard posts were alerted and search parties immediately organized.

No Little Mick.

A net of State Police and prison guard patrols was spread out from Plattsburg to Saranac to Malone to Ticonderoga to Plattsburg. For ten days all main and secondary roads in a twenty-mile radius around Dannemora were patrolled around the clock. All bridges, streams, and lakes were under constant surveillance. Every path out of Clinton Prison was watched on the chance that Little Mick might be forced to use one. The thickly wooded mountains surrounding the prison were beaten by volunteers from nearby villages.

No Little Mick.

Inside the prison every building, every room in every building, every cell block, and every cell was carefully, painstakingly searched. Every crate and every container was opened and frisked. Every inch of prison ground was combed over by squads of searchers.

No Little Mick.

To the prison officials, the most puzzling thing about Little Mick's disappearance was the disturbing realization that he had managed the thing without leaving any trace. The thousands of feet of wall enclosing the prison were carefully examined — no marks of grappling hooks, no ladder scratches, no rope ends. Nothing. The base of the wall was tested with long steel rods, punctur-

ing the ground every few feet, searching for a tunnel under the wall.

No tunnel, no Little Mick.

Little Mick's friends were questioned day after day. The cons who worked in the laundry with him were questioned. The guards who ran his company, his cell block, his gallery, were questioned.

No clues, no Little Mick.

Days added up to weeks and weeks added up to one month. Road patrols were called off. Circulars offering rewards for Little Mick's capture were sent to distant cities and states. Little Mick's home in New York City, his relatives, and his friends were put under surveillance.

Still no Little Mick.

An officer assigned to the band company sat on the bed in Weepy's cell, idly jiggling his club by its thong so that it tapped lightly on the thick, slate slab that formed part of the cell floor. He was waiting for Weepy to finish pouring coffee for the two of them.

"You knew Little Mick, didn't you, Weepy?"

Weepy grinned but his sharp black eyes were suspicious. "Yeah. I seen him around. Enough ta say hello ta him."

"The front office is going nuts trying to figure out how he made it. . . . There's nothing to show whether he went under the wall or over it. He couldn't have hidden in a truck going out, because no trucks went out that day — and he sure as hell didn't fly out! The warden and the P.K. sure are worried. They figure if one guy can find a way out, without leaving a single trace, other guys'll find it too. . . ."

"Yeah. I guess it's tough — fa them. Here's ya coffee."

The guard stopped tapping his club and the two drank their coffee in silence.

Three weeks later, to the day, Weepy disappeared.

Same warnings, same patrols, same searches, same questions.

And the same blank wall.

The front office was frantic. The prison officials were forced to assume that Little Mick, before he broke out, had told Weepy about the perfect escape. By the same token, Weepy could have told another con, who would soon disappear, and he would have told another and he another and another and another until the prison was emptied.

Stool pigeons were called on for information and friends and

acquaintances of the two missing men were offered bribes and rewards in the form of better jobs, recommendations to the Parole Board, and promises of cut sentences.

But Little Mick and Weepy were gone and not a solitary con in Dannemora knew how the escape had been managed.

A few days after the prison officials had conceded the success of Weepy's escape by calling in all patrols, the band company guard, the same man with whom Weepy had shared his coffee, let himself into the escaped convict's cell.

He went over it brick by brick, scratching into the mortar. He tested every rivet, every bar of the gate, he tapped the floor a thousand times, and he shook his head in discouragement. He was licked. What he had just done had been done a dozen times by a dozen guards and with the same results. There was absolutely nothing to indicate that Weepy had started the first step of his journey to freedom out of that cell. Yet that was the way it had to be. The guard spat; he had locked Weepy in himself — just before the escape.

He remembered the six o'clock count. He remembered saying good night to Weepy. And at seven the alarm had sounded and Weepy was gone. . . .

He sat on the bed, shaking his head. The club slipped through his hands and the thong hooked over his thumb. It was an automatic, habitual performance. He began moving his thumb, jiggling the club, tapping it lightly against the floor. He was hardly aware of what he was doing.

The tip of the club tapped rhythmically in a small circle for several minutes before the man became conscious of a slight break in the steady, soothing tap-tap-tap.

At one point in the circle the club was hitting something that was not slate.

He leaned over, examining the floor between his feet. The slate was blue-gray, polished smooth by countless men pacing desperately back and forth through the decades. Except in one spot. A number of closely grouped, overlapping indentations broke the even surface of the floor. Indentations made by his club. He pressed his thumb over the pocked surface, leaving an oval print.

A few minutes later the principal keeper and a group of guards

equipped with crowbars were in the cell, poking away at the spot where the thumbprint clearly showed.

"Here it is!"

One of the guards wedged his crowbar into the floor. He pressed and the stone's smooth surface broke, showing a crack running under the bed. More pressure and other cracks appeared.

A two-foot-square slab of slate was pried up. It was the lid for a hole that dropped straight down for five feet. The P.K. examined the slate cover. A gummy substance adhered to the edges. The principal keeper scraped some off with his finger. He smelled it.

"Sonofabitch!" His tone admired the cleverness of the scheme. "Soap. Just plain soap and I bet they used ink to get the exact color of the slate. Sons of bitches!"

An officer was sent into the tunnel with orders to explore its length.

The five-foot drop directly below the cut-out slab in Weepy's cell constituted the shaft. The drop widened at its base, forming a conical chamber about four feet in diameter. The tunnel proper ran in a northerly direction, averaged eighteen inches in diameter — enough for a man of considerable size to squeeze through. From its starting point in the shaft it sloped downward, four inches to the foot, for three hundred and sixty-five feet. At that point it was seventeen feet directly under the prison wall, which was imbedded fifteen feet below ground level. The slope leveled off and the tunnel continued, without turns, for another seventy-three feet, where it broke through and terminated in a street sewer.

The discovery of the tunnel removed the front office from an acutely embarrassing spot.

"At least we know they didn't figure a magic way out. They must be in Montreal or God knows where by this time!"

But Weepy and the Little Mick were not in Montreal and they felt exactly like the front office about only God knowing where they were.

For three weeks Little Mick lived alone in a burrow scratched out of the side of Lion Mountain. He had selected the hiding place only because the brush seemed thicker and the trees taller and closer together. The freshly dug earth was carefully packed around

the bases of nearby trees and completely concealed by a layer of dead leaves. His hiding place was perfectly camouflaged with a netting of tree branches and a covering of leaves. He left it only for brief excursions for water and calls of nature — and only in the early dawn and late twilight.

For twenty-one days Little Mick stood pat in his burrow. He kept track of the days by tying a knot for each, on the short length of string he had taken off a Bull Durham sack the day after he had broken through to the sewer.

The carton of twenty-four Hershey almond bars he'd taken along was strictly rationed — one bar a day. Though Little Mick did not smoke during the day and though he was extremely reluctant to light up during the night, he ran out of tobacco about the tenth day.

Being out of tobacco was the worst of his problems. Worse than crouching worriedly in his burrow while posses passed by, searching within feet of his hiding place.

When the fourteenth knot was tied he felt safe but would not venture out any more than was absolutely necessary. He knew, with great elation, that the organized hunt in the vicinity of the prison, in the county, in the State at least as far south as Albany, was called off. This was the perfect beat. A few more days, a few more weeks, and the Law would be thoroughly licked.

It was early dawn when Little Mick counted twenty-one knots on the yellow string. He waited until the sun passed by, high overhead. He waited until his shadow was as long as he was tall.

On his way down Lion Mountain, Little Mick had a clear view of Clinton Prison. He felt like waving jubilantly to the hundreds of miniature figures milling about in the recreation yard.

Little Mick was happy. He was on the right side of the wall. He was free. He had the world waiting for him.

The yard was open, so it had to be after three-thirty. The cons were not yet lined up for mess hall, so it was not yet five. His timing was great.

He stopped on a bluff overlooking the prison. A baseball game was in progress and Little Mick tried to guess what shop's teams were playing. He gave up almost immediately, and his eyes searched for individual figures, for a particular figure, for the one for whom he waited.

He thought of Weepy. Sure, he knew the big bum was using him for a guinea pig. Little Mick knew that if the escape plan had fouled up he, and not Weepy, would get another seven years added to his already long sentence. Little Mick knew he had left himself wide open to being double-crossed by Weepy — to being shot or half beaten to death by the screws.

Little Mick knew, too, that he never would have been there on the bluff if it hadn't been for Weepy. Little Mick knew, too, that only with the aid of Weepy was eventual safety in some distant city possible.

A column of white steam shot up from the roof of the Administration Building and after a few seconds Little Mick heard the five o'clock whistle.

Suppertime, and he had better get moving. He waited until the figures in the yard had lined up into company units. He waited until the companies began marching off toward the mess hall.

It was dark enough to turn on the great searchlights on the wall by the time Little Mick reached the spot for which he had set out. He was within one hundred and fifty feet of the prison's north wall. An asphalt road ran about halfway between where he hid in a clump of trees and the wall. Rising partly out of the ditch beside the road was the concrete shaft of a sewer, topped with a circular iron lid. In spite of his discomfort at being so close to the prison, in spite of the insistent urge to run back to his burrow, Little Mick kept his eyes glued to that sewer.

He worried about the house several hundred yards up the road. He worried about the possibility of some kid wandering into the clump of trees hiding him. He worried about the likelihood of being spotted by a sharp-eyed screw in the guard tower above. But his eyes never moved from that sewer, even after it got too dark to see it.

Little Mick was startled by the sound he expected.

"Sssst! Mick! Sssst! Mick!" It was Weepy.

The two shook hands silently and started their journey uphill. Weepy had two bundles packed in cloth sacks — food, smokes, and clothes which would have to last for at least fourteen days. Little Mick took one of the bundles and led the way.

They had just got back to where Little Mick had been hiding,

when the prison whistle blasted its second alarm in three weeks.

Weepy grinned in the darkness. "There she goes again!" His voice was tense with triumph.

After carefully covering the opening, the two men made themselves comfortable in the hiding place. Weepy sighed with great satisfaction. "God, that guardroom must be jumpin now! I tell ya, Mick! Wait'll the boys find out I'm gone too! It's perfect, I tell ya. Nobody knows nothin except me an you. . . ."

They took a chance on a cigarette each out of the supply Weepy had brought. "Christ, we gotta celebrate somehow!"

Weepy rummaged through the sacks, fishing out thick sandwiches of ham and bologna and cheese. Little Mick wolfed them down while Weepy emptied the sacks.

"We got plenty a tobacco an matches — I figure we'll be here a coupla weeks anyway an it'll be hell without smokes. An plenty a chocolate an beans ta keep us goin. Some white shirts I had the ol lady send me — we're gonna need them when we take off. Oh yeah! Here's a coupla pieces a business that one a the guys made for me inna machine shop. . . ."

The couple of pieces of business were two sharp, heavy-bladed knives.

"I figured a shiv might come in handy. I'm tellin ya now, Mick, they ain't bringin me back ta Dannemoral!"

When the sandwiches were finished the two discussed future plans. Weepy had everything worked out. Little Mick did the listening.

"We stay put here till the patrols are called off — two weeks anyway, maybe more. Then we make fa Saranac an make fa the lake. We gotta keep outa Plattsburg — that's hot alla time — we go around it, then all we gotta do is folla the Hudson down ta Troy. That oughta be easy. Once we're in Troy, like I told ya, we're set. I got friends there an we got nothin ta worry about."

Weepy thought of everything. He said they must be on guard at all times; that they must take turns sleeping. "Maybe it ain't necessary, but just in case . . ."

In the morning the two men ate a Hershey bar each. Little Mick showed his partner the mountain stream which provided an abundance of cold water. He warned Weepy to cover every footstep to

and from the stream. "The screws patrol aroun here like mad. Ya gotta be careful every second! Actually, we should come out here only at night. . . ."

Weepy was too excited to sleep or rest. He had to talk about their escape.

"Right after the six o'clock count. I had everythin ready. Everythin packed. Every step a the way figured. Then I think ta myself. Suppose a gallery man comes by with a pass fa me, suppose he sees me goin down, Christ! So I shove a lotta stuff, books, newspapers, shoes, ol clothes, anythin I see, under the blanket an fix it all up so it looks like I'm sleepin. An I put the light out. I feel panicky and I'm doing everythin in a rush. I'm thinkin how easy everythin could be bollixed up. Just some jerk walkin by, that's all, an I'm finished. Then I remember the thousands a times I walked out ta empty the crap bucket we were usin ta get the dirt outa the tunnel. I was takin a chance every time! Suppose some rat noticed me dumpin it? Suppose some screw wanted ta know how come I'm going out with the bucket three, four times a day? So I says ta myself, Ya got away with that, didn't ya? An if ya got away with that ya'll get away with anythin!

"An I remembered the frisk afta ya holed up inna tunnel. Man! They really went over every inch a Dannemora. Ya have no ideal. Askin questions, searchin, watchin . . .

"Anyway, I finally get the cover up. I figure, here goes, it's gonna be everythin or nothin. Mick, I can't exp'ain how easy everythin went! I can't believe it yet. . . . I tell ya we can't miss. Everything is goin our way. . . ."

The second day was full of nervousness and tension. Little Mick heard the first sounds of search about midmorning. Weepy was sleeping. Mick heard the searchers calling to each other. He did not feel as lonely and frightened as when the woods were being combed for him alone. He hefted the mean-looking knife Weepy had given him. No, it wasn't as bad with a friend along.

The search party never came close to the hiding place.

The next eleven days went by. Weepy and Little Mick, accustomed to prison routine, quickly fell into an easy pattern of inactivity. The self-imposed system of rationing kept the two from worrying about food or tobacco. They lived on one bar of choco-

late each a day, and they allowed themselves one cigarette each, at twilight and at dawn — when it was least likely that the flare of a match or puff of smoke might attract hostile eyes.

On the thirteenth night Weepy and Little Mick started the trek to Troy. Mick was impatient. Mick wanted to get to Troy. Mick wanted civilian clothes and money in his pocket.

They had an argument about direction. Weepy won that when he jabbed a finger toward the distant mountains. "Saranac's over there!" he said. "That's where we gotta go first. They would never expect us to head fa there. Then we go aroun Plattsburg — there." He pointed to the mountains crouching along the shores of Lake Champlain. "Afta that it's a cinch. Just folla the Hudson, an there we are — Troy!"

"Okay, partner. Ya show the way, but let's get started before I blow my stack."

It was near midnight. Weepy led the way, carefully stepping over fallen branches, stones, dry leaves, and pine cones. They made their way around the side of the mountain silently — they were still in dangerous territory, the prison was too near.

They were exhausted by the time the sun rose. Little Mick was disgusted. "Jesus! Nothin but trees! Ya sure ya know where ya goin, Weepy?"

"Sure I'm sure!" Weepy pointed toward the blue-violet mountains. "Saranac's over that way. It's gotta be!"

They had a Hershey-bar breakfast and a leisurely smoke. They spoke in their normal voices and they puffed slowly, relishing the tobacco. For the first time they slept without standing guard.

They awakened at noon when the sun was straight overhead. They had another smoke, then picked up their bundles and started off again, Weepy leading the way.

It was hot, even under the trees, and when they had to cross open spaces the sun burned their skins. Little Mick began to complain about his feet. Both wore prison shoes which fitted hardly well enough for the kind of treatment Weepy and Little Mick were imposing upon them.

They walked a rough, sometimes rocky, always uneven path. They felt blisters forming on their heels and between their toes.

The sun got hotter. A shallow stream gave some relief. They drank deeply and, without bothering to take their clothes off, they

rolled in the refreshing water, sopping up its coolness. They shared another cigarette and another few minutes in the water. Their feet, cool and wet in the soaking shoes, felt fine. They felt fine until the coarse, tough leather began shrinking, until the tender, blistered feet began swelling.

Weepy and Little Mick took off their shoes and socks, releasing tormented feet. They went on, stumbling, cursing. Every step was agony and only the hope of freedom gave them the desperation for the next step.

Evening brought them relief from the sun. They rested for an hour. The need to reach a town was so great, they decided to go on through the night. Weepy was certain that Saranac was over "that way."

The blisters on their feet had broken and the cuts and bruises were raw, bleeding, and painful. They both limped and each drove himself and his companion.

"We gotta make town! We gotta make town!"

They carried the prison-made knives in their hands.

Little Mick was the first to see the light. He froze, thrusting his arm against Weepy in a warning gesture. The light did not flicker or move. Weepy quickly figured it out.

"It's a house. It's a light in a house, Mick!"

They held a conference.

"It's a farm," was Mick's opinion. "What we oughta do is find the barn an hole up till mornin. Then maybe we can find some eggs or some goddam thing ta eat besides chocolate. Besides, the rest'll do us good. My feet are about finished."

"It's a farm, all right," Weepy conceded, "an I bet there're others all aroun. I got a feelin we're near Saranac and we oughta head fa town. Ya gotta admit our chances will be better in a town than in some goddam barn. I think we oughta go ahead. Town can't be too far off."

The idea of safety in a town was too strong for Mick's argument. The two set out again. They found a dirt road that was easy on their feet. They followed it boldly and when a turn brought them in sight of several brightly lit houses they were elated.

"I told ya, didn't I?" Weepy was jubilant. "I told ya!"

They passed a billboard advertising Burma Shave. It was as though God himself had placed that sign at the edge of the road

to let them know He was watching over them, that He had not forgotten them, that He was with them and, being with them, He assured the success of their escape. They hugged each other happily in front of the sign.

"Christ! It's almost like home! When ya see these aroun ya know there's a town near."

"Let's get goin!"

This time there was no hesitation. No doubt. No argument. They made their way across a furrowed field of hardened clots of earth and broken stalks of last year's corn. It was murderous going, but Weepy and Little Mick almost enjoyed the torture. Town was nearby and the delight of walking on asphalt, on concrete, would be doubled, trebled! The pair had hardly left the cornfield and regained the dirt road when they were confronted by hundreds of lights sparkling up the side of the mountain.

"There it is! There it is!" Weepy gripped his friend's arm. "There it is!"

They felt safe. Saranac was far enough away from Dannemora for them to feel that only a really bad break might give them away. Saranac was another world. Saranac was a peaceful town full of friendly people. Saranac was sanctuary.

Weepy and Little Mick approached the town without fear. It was only when they felt asphalt under their suffering feet that they remembered the Law, police, State Troopers. They started walking in the shadows of trees and lightless buildings.

"We gotta look like a coupla guys out fa a walk," Weepy said. "I think it's time fa us ta get rid a these gray shirts an start lookin like square johns."

While they changed into the white shirts Weepy cursed himself for having forgotten to bring along a razor. Both men had heavy growths of beard.

"Well," Weepy ended berating himself, "there's no use beefin about it. We'll just hafta look like a coupla farmers in town fa a holiday."

"We steer clear a the main drag. Too many lights an too many people. We stick ta the side streets an duck anybody that comes too close. Keep ya shiv handy but don't make any moves unless ya hafta. Okay?"

It was okay. It was wonderful. It was as though they were al-

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ready in Troy, enjoying the protection of Weepy's friends, the gastronomic delights of civilized food, and the anatomic diversions of a couple of understanding ladies.

Weepy sighed. He forced his foot into one of the hard, shapeless shoes he'd been carrying all day. The sigh turned into a groan. Little Mick's feet were in worse shape.

"It's no use, Weepy. My dogs won't take it any more. I can just about make it without shoes. Maybe the swellin'll go down tomorra an I can put them on, but not tonight!"

Weepy, being in the same boat, agreed that wearing shoes at night was not as important as wearing shoes during the day. "We'll look even more like farmers this way! Besides, no one'll be able ta see if we're barefoot or not."

"That's what I say. Let's get goin. . . ."

They walked by the illuminated windows of several small stores and, a little farther on, a group of men sitting on a porch talking.

"Man, we made it!" Weepy couldn't help slapping Mick on the back.

They passed more people. People strolling along the streets. People looking out of windows. They nodded a silent greeting to a man walking a dog.

Weepy and Little Mick relaxed their holds on the knives they held in their pockets. This was a cinch! They came to an intersection, deserted except for the solitary figure of a man standing under a street light. He smiled as Weepy and Little Mick approached.

"Good evenin. . . ."

"Good evenin!"

"Where you boys headin for?"

Almost leisurely, the man drew a gun.

Weepy and Little Mick knew, recognized the gesture the moment it was begun. Their knives flashed under the light.

"Don't you boys move, or I'll sure as hell shoot you down!" The man said it pleasantly. He meant it, and the two friends knew it.

"Drop the shivs, boys!"

The knives pinged on the pavement.

"I guess you boys better come along with me. . . ."

Weepy and Little Mick knew it would be futile to argue or plead.

They began walking slowly in the direction the man had indicated with his gun. Mick limped badly. He whined about his feet giving out.

"Only a little ways to go, boys, and your feet will be well taken care of!"

They turned a corner, stepped off the curb, and crossed the street to the main gate of Clinton Prison.

Weepy and Little Mick had traveled in a great circle around the base of Lion Mountain.

The claimant of the fifty-dollar reward offered for the capture of Weepy and Little Mick admitted that there was nothing suspicious about the two men. He thought they might be hobos, "except that I couldn't imagine hobos carrying their shoes."

EIGHTEEN

DANNEMORA WAS IN FOR A FACE LIFTING. THE RUMOR SPREAD to every block, every cell, every court, every shop. A new policy, a new penology, was to take over. A new and revolutionary approach toward the handling of prisoners and the running of the prison. The new slogan was to be "Rehabilitation through Resocialization." The cons were skeptical about the whole business. The old-timers pronounced the new-budding program as being politically inspired and the late-comers accepted their decision as final — it was all politics.

Nevertheless exciting events were taking place. Another warden had been installed, at least temporarily. He was a quiet, respected man who understood the inmates and the guards. Most of us remembered him as an ordinary guard. His first official order was to prohibit the use of metal-tipped clubs.

Old Principal Keeper O'Brien died, and we crowded around the school and shop windows above wall level to enjoy the sight of the funeral procession escorting his remains to a nearby cemetery. The P.K. who replaced him — again temporarily, because of official uncertainty about the wardenship — conscientiously enforced the new rules and regulations which every day offered us additional privileges and which irrevocably undermined the old system's management by fear.

On our way to the shops one morning we discovered steam shovels, bulldozers, trucks, and their curious, timid-looking crews. At least part of the rumor was crystallizing. All day, every day, for weeks we watched the machines shoveling and removing earth.

New machines and men arrived. Long-boomed cranes and concrete mixers; trucks piled high with bricks and sand and cement; trailers creaking under the weight of steel beams and heavy planking.

The first building to be completed was the mess hall — an omen in red brick minus the traditional barred windows. The last meal in the old mess hall, breakfast, was like all the breakfasts served there from the time it was built. There was an almost carnival air about rejecting it — we were that full of excitement and anticipation of dinner at the new mess hall, which a few of the runners and kitchen help had already seen and described in detail.

It was chrome and tile, shiny and clean. Meals were served cafeteria style from behind spotless counters. Stainless-steel-topped tables, bolted to the floor and sporting attached stools which swung out when in use and out of sight when not, accommodated eight men each and afforded ample elbow room. The seating arrangement had us facing each other. It was fine when a friend happened to be opposite, bearable when facing a stranger, but very rough indeed when your enemy manipulated a sharp-pronged fork, inches from your face.

The building machines and their crews remained. They were augmented by a couple of convict “yard gangs” created specifically to help in the construction work. By this time everyone in the prison, including the guards, knew that eventually the new mess hall would be flanked by two new cell blocks already designated “A” Block and “B” Block. Even while the foundations for these were being dug an auditorium was finished on the ground floor of the mess-hall building. Another building, which in time would be the main entrance to a system of cell blocks and maintenance shops, was on its way to completion. Its impressive doorways would serve the cell blocks, and it would house the laundry, the bathhouse, and, on the top floor, a barbershop and shoe shop.

The weave-shop men were the first to be moved into the new cell blocks. We were assigned to A Block and I was given cell 42 on 2 gallery.

Officially I became 22818-A2-42.

The most exciting improvement offered by our new quarters was the absence of bedbugs. We meant to keep it that way. Each

man set himself up as a committee of one to see that his neighbors kept their cells thoroughly policed. All reading material was suspect — in a non-literary way — and had to be closely inspected for traces of pediculosis.

The cells were an habitual convict's dream fulfilled: steel cubicles, the front end fashioned of hacksaw-resistant bars, a section of which rolled back and forth noiselessly, automatically, under control of the hall keeper operating electric control panels.

Compared with the old, the new cells were tremendous. Eight feet by eight feet, and every cell with a sink and flush toilet. Every cell with a new bed with new springs and mattress. Every bed with new blankets and sheets and pillowcases. An electric light switch, convenient to reach while lying in bed, controlled the single light fixture built into the center of the back wall.

Other furnishings were a six-foot locker, a small square of sheet metal linged to the wall for use as a table or desk, and a chair. The ancient jailhouse custom of pasting or drawing stimulating pictures on the walls was declared off the books. Forbidden, too, were curtains and lampshades — restrictions which deprived the cells of individuality in favor of uniformity and cleanliness.

Old-timers, prison stiffs, and newcomers agreed it was almost worth while doing a stretch in such near luxury.

"Christ! I been in hotels all over the country an *paid* for rooms not half as good as this!"

Only a handful of the most hopeless habitual offenders preferred the old cell blocks. Any variation in their accepted pattern of living was more than they could bear.

The high point of excitement declined after a few months. Prison was prison — even platinum bars and pheasant under glass would not take the place of a walk along a home-town street.

Blocks C and D were on the way up and everyone in Dannemora knew where F Block would be built. Everyone knew that soon the East Hall, the West Hall, and the South Hall would be demolished, but the excitement was no longer as sharp as it had been when the first trucks and cranes moved inside the walls of the prison. The inmate and official population of Dannemora had adapted itself to the new conditions.

The one change occurring in the weave shop was the over-

hauling and speeding up of all machines. A new, civilian foreman had stepped up the shop's production goal and his days and nights were dedicated to its attainment. Not so apparent was the guards' attitude toward the men working in their companies. Our shop had good guards to start off with and we were not as acutely aware of what was happening to the institution personnel. The amazing news spread out from the other shops, from the other cell blocks.

"No pinch if you grab a smoke during working hours — just don't smoke around cotton or oil or wood. . . ."

"No pinch if you have a pot of coffee on the job. . . ."

"Remember that miserable screw who has such-and-such company? Well, he said good morning to every guy in the company when he opened the gates. . . ."

"No pinch if you're out of step when the company is marching. . . ."

"No pinch if you forget to button your coat. . . ."

"The new screws are pretty decent guys. There's something different about them. . . ."

"No pinch if you wear a white shirt. . . ."

"No pinch if . . ."

"No pinch."

And no more workouts.

And no more Hole.

Even the physical aspects of Dannemora were undergoing a transformation. Terraces were laid out and covered with sod. Men were assigned to see that they were kept mowed, free of bald spots and litter. Dirt paths were widened, leveled, and covered with native stone or brick and slate that had once been part of the old mess hall. Shrubs and even a few trees were planted in such spots as would not offer a tempting path over the wall.

Something was done about the recreation yard. Steam shovels and trucks were moved in and set to work. The plan was to cut into the hillside, to terrace it, to make an amphitheater where the whole inmate population could gather to watch baseball and football games; where cons could play cards, checkers, or chess. Where friends could meet to talk or stroll. Individually owned courts were to be abolished and a democratic plan was to be put into operation.

One of the things we cons were not democratic-minded about

was our courts. Setting up a system of courts available to the prison population without regard to color, religion, or category of crime was fiercely resisted.

Wops fraternized with Donkeys, Kikes with Goyim, even an occasional "right" nigger might be invited to have coffee or spaghetti on a white man's court. A pickpocket might be hanging out with a heist man or burglar, a con man might be on intimate terms with a rape artist or purse snatcher. But no one would obey an order to share his court with convicts he regarded as unfit for his company. No one would obey an order to reject the old caste system. No one would obey an order to give up the tiny square of land he considered his own in order that the whole population might enjoy the spaciousness of the recreation yard.

No one. No Hunkies, no Spicks. No niggers and no Hoosiers. No Christ-killers, no Christ-worshippers. No junkies and no torpedoes. Announcements and pronouncements were made by the front office and were rejected by the very minorities they were designed to aid.

The plan died a quiet death.

At first the appearance of the new guards caused amused comment among the cons. We thought they were too young, for one thing. Being ordered about by beardless youths was very funny to the tough, hardened, ruthless criminals the newspapers and movies had told us we were. We interpreted their uncertainties about prison routine as indications of fear. Their direct, peasant-mannered approach to all our problems was also construed as a manifestation of terror.

We learned better. These kids were not afraid. These knew exactly what they were doing. These were nice kids. Word got around that the new penology insisted upon at least a high school education for the new guards. That won respect. A respect that was permanent when we further learned that these men had been especially trained for their jobs and were obliged to work on a probationary basis for a three-month period before being accepted into the Correction Department's civil service employ.

In school I became closely associated with this new variety of guard, who had been assigned to help with the teaching program. Though they were older than I, I still considered them youngsters

because I felt that maturity was impossible without criminal experience. This failing aside, they were reasonably "good guys," generally liked and respected.

NINETEEN

LEFTY INTRODUCED ME TO BEAT-IT TOMMY TASSIA. TOMMY WAS the sort about whom no opinion could be formed. Neat, quiet-mannered, handsome, he had a bearing and appearance suggesting candor and honesty but there was something about him that provoked uneasiness, suspicion. You wanted to trust him but you felt it might be better to wait, to make certain. He was one of the rare convicts who spoke correct English, uncolored by underworld argot.

We met on my court. After coffee Tommy came right to the point.

"I asked Lefty to introduce us. I've been hearing about your ability as an artist and I've seen some of the work you have done. I have a proposition for you. How would you like to become art editor on a magazine I'm going to start in here?"

Tommy had an idea which he broached to several of the higher-echelon officials. He proposed to organize and run a magazine which was to be published in the prison, by the prison's inmates. The magazine would be a true reflection of life in prison, of the convicts' hopes, aspirations, opinions, beefs, and gripes.

"The permanent heading on the editorial page will be, 'Let the Chips Fall Where They May.' Not very original, but suggestive of the slant we intend to give the magazine. The warden and Prof are all for it."

Technically the magazine was to be a school publication, directly supervised by Prof.

"I have known the Prof a long time and he has agreed that a publication of the sort we are contemplating should be free of official interference."

The school would contribute a discarded mimeograph machine which could be put into working order with a minimum of ingenuity. The school would also provide space, ink, and enough of the cheapest grade yellow paper to print two thousand copies of the first issue.

"We will need a great deal more," said Tommy, "and we'll get it! I have enough friends in here to be assured of the fullest co-operation. You see," Tommy explained further, "we'll have to operate without an official budget, at least for a while. We'll get that too, eventually. In the meantime we'll have to beg, borrow, and steal whatever we cannot get legitimately."

The thought of being connected with an outlet for the dissatisfaction, the bitterness, the resentment I felt was so appealing, I accepted Tommy's offer without reservations.

"You will not be paid for working on the magazine," he pointed out, "you will not be assigned, officially, as a member of the staff. You will have to give up the art class and you'll have to continue working half a day every day in the weave shop."

I felt that the only thing that mattered was for me to be with the magazine.

"That's fine," said Tommy. "I'll see Prof in the morning. He will arrange an immediate transfer from the art class to the magazine."

Our first problem was the mimeograph machine. This was put in working order after two days of pulling connections for bits of wire, odd pieces of tin and copper sheeting, nails, screws, and assorted lengths of twine. The trial run provided a blurred, fuzzy, unevenly printed sheet that was just legible. The editor-in-chief pronounced our printing plant in working order.

"Considering the equipment, we cannot expect better results than this. Besides, the poor printing will be compensated for by the pictures you will make."

I liked that.

Tommy had already decided upon a name for the magazine but he went through the motions of making me an active participant in the project. We wandered about the tiny stock room that was to serve as editorial, printing, and distribution office, cerebrating, interrupting each other's thoughts with bursts of inspiration.

"How about *Star of Dannemora*?" I had been introduced to Byron, Keats, and Shelley a short time before and was undergoing a romantic regeneration.

"Not bad. But don't you think it a bit too lyrical for a convicts' magazine?"

"I guess you're right."

"How about ——?"

"No. Too obvious."

"Right."

"How about ——?"

"No."

"How about ——?"

"No."

After hours of this Tommy announced, "The only name that will appeal and be understandable to the majority of the inmate population is *Tab-O-Graph*."

He had it figured out. "It contains the two elements which will be acceptable to and recognized by the average con: underworld lingo and a simple descriptive term. We will borrow *Graph* from 'mimeograph,' which will accurately describe the mechanical process of producing the magazine. *Tab* can have only one meaning for a convict — conveying a written note or message to another convict."

That was it.

Tab-O-Graph.

It developed that Tommy was a genuine old-timer. Technically he was only a second offender, but he had been arrested innumerable times. At the time I met him he was serving an indeterminate sentence for parole violation.

"It's ludicrous," he said.

And it was.

"The chairman of the Parole Board invited me up to Sing Sing for what I understood was to be a friendly, social chat, after the Board had finished its official business in the prison. I went in all innocence. I regarded the chairman as a personal friend. He had been the chief factor in my having obtained parole; he had taken an active interest in me after I had been released. Incidentally, the

invitation had been sent by him. I made the trip to Sing Sing, delighted at the prospect of seeing an old friend.

"The Parole Board was still in session when I arrived and I was asked to wait in the warden's office.

"I looked out of the window of the warden's office. A line of convicts, chained to each other, were waiting in the courtyard below.

"From previous experience, I knew it was a draft to one of the other State prisons. I felt sorry for the unfortunates. I had been through a similar ordeal several years before and understood the dejection and unhappiness they felt."

Tommy paused, recollecting the moment.

"Feeling sorry for them! Feeling sorry that they were in prison. Feeling sorry that they were obliged to wait until the moment of the official order to move on, chained and miserable, to another prison."

Tommy stopped talking for a minute, then went on.

"They were waiting for the Parole Board's decision. While I was feeling sorry for them they were waiting for the Parole Board to make out the necessary papers recommitting me to prison! While I was feeling sorry for them, they were waiting for *me!*"

Why? How come? What happened?

"I thought I was about to see a friend, the chairman of the Board. I had been working steadily at the job he had secured for me. I was adhering religiously to all the rules of parole. I did not stay out late at night. I did not consort with criminals. I did not drink or frequent houses of ill repute. In short, I was an ideal parolee.

"My sole misfortune was that the officer who supervised my parole was a crude, unimaginative, boorish individual who reveled in making life unpleasant for me. I did not mind too much. I suffered his vulgarities. But when he deliberately attempted to humiliate me I felt it was time to make my position crystal-clear.

"I had been making the obligatory monthly report. With a group of other parolees, I sat patiently in an outer office, awaiting my turn. I was well dressed at the time — a dark business suit, a homburg, a conservative tie, spats, and I carried a cane. I was a gentleman. That is precisely what that parole officer resented. He opened the door leading into his office and yelled, 'Tassia!' I felt I was

being deliberately degraded for the amusement of the other ex-cons sitting in the room with me. I immediately rebuked the parole officer for neglecting to address me in a proper manner. I reminded him I was *Mister Tassia*.

"He was resentful of the position I took but made no issue of it then and there. I thought the business settled. I made my report and left. What happened after that is, of course, pure speculation. I suspect he wrote a derogatory report and sent it to the chairman of the Board. A meeting was undoubtedly held, a prejudicial version of the affair was read into the record, and, I feel certain, a decision to declare me a parole violator was made then and there.

"At no time was I informed of what was happening and at no time was an indication made that the Parole Board was in any way displeased with my conduct or with my observation of the rules and regulations governing parole.

"I was given to understand that the invitation to attend the Sing Sing meeting was for the purpose of discussing, in a friendly manner, my parole program and, in particular, the job at which I was working."

That was Beat-it Tommy Tassia's story.

The official report on Thomas Tassia stated that the occasion of his violation of parole occurred when Tassia obtained a second job without notifying his parole officer. The decision to declare him a poor risk was brought about by the fact that Tassia had obtained the second job under false pretenses. He had given an assumed name; he had submitted references and recommendations which had been written by himself on stationery purloined from offices of nationally known business organizations.

However, the most disturbing element in all of these maneuvers, from the standpoint of the Parole Board, was the fact that Tassia, with a long criminal record, was able in this manner to get a job with a large firm — as paymaster.

"They gave me a raw deal," Tommy insisted. "They have the advantage at the moment. But I am not going to accept this without a struggle — I owe the State too much time. The Board chairman left specific instructions that no letters from me to him are to be

allowed out of the institution. That is why I thought of the *Tab-O-Graph*. I know that if I establish contact with the chairman, in any way, I can convince him that this has been a terrible mistake.

"All I ask of you is to go along with me for the next year or year and a half. During that time you can do yourself a great deal of good by making contacts where they will count most. The day will arrive when you will see the possibility of obtaining your own freedom and your association with the prison magazine will weigh conspicuously in your favor."

Tommy was a persuasive talker. Besides, that was the way I wanted to see it.

The first issue of the *Tab-O-Graph* sported a three-color cover depicting a beacon shining steadily and hopefully through the black night. The masthead bore the valiant motto, "Ad Astra Per Aspera," which we had found ready-made in Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary. An editorial footnote remarked:

The aim of the *Tab-O-Graph* is to foster an urge for self-improvement among the "Inmate Population" from which the school draws its student body. Its pages offer a useful medium through which specimen work by students may be exhibited as a mark reflecting achievement and pride in scholastic accomplishment.

No individual sentiment or opinion expressed herein shall be construed as representing the policy or views of the Staff, Institution, or Administration personnel.

Contributions along Educational, Inspirational, and Progressive lines are invited from all.

Tommy and I were the only ones genuinely excited by the first issue of the magazine. Tommy, because that first issue represented the initial and most important step in his plan for reattaining freedom; I, because I had successfully accomplished a departure from the pattern imposed upon all convicts the moment they enter prison. The days of shop drudgery, of unchanging routine, of deadening monotony were over for 22818.

Volume I, Number I, of the *Tab-O-Graph* consisted of two thousand copies. Fifteen hundred copies were mailed to prison officials in Dannemora and throughout the State of New York.

Special attention was given to the carefully selected copies destined for the members of the Parole Board.

The remaining five hundred copies were distributed among the more than two thousand inmates of the prison.

Inmate reaction to the *Tab-O-Graph* was swift.

"What kinda crap is this?" summed up the attitude of the prison population.

The criticism, Tommy agreed, was completely justified. The whole of that first issue was dedicated to the prison and State Administration — the Law. All the officials' names, from the governor to the commissioner of correction to the warden on down, were included in the magazine's twenty-four pages. The virtues of the principal keeper, of the hall keepers, of the shop guards, of the bathroom guard, of practically every officer in the place, were extolled.

A concession had been made to the inmate population in the form of a column featuring such gems as:

Tammany Al, who sidekicks with the Democratic elite of wise Gotham, still dwells in owlish silence in suite 11. Says he, 'My main ambition right now is to spot Monti, or Sharkey, five points on the handball court and shut them out . . . ! (Al, if you can shut out that Monti in anything, you have a worthwhile ambition that will prove a boon and a service to mankind if you succeed!) Tee Hee!

We spent long hours explaining the reason for slanting the *Tab-O-Graph* the way we had. Tommy's particular advantage rested upon the overwhelming fact that he was a very right guy. Everyone in the prison respected and admired him. His escape from Sing Sing, when, armed with a monkey wrench, he bluffed his way to freedom, was already a legend. Everyone in Dannemora knew that the underworld code of silence and loyalty was Tommy's guide for all his thoughts, actions, and words. Convincing the prison population that the *Tab-O-Graph* was Tommy's personal business was not too difficult. Criticism died out — at least it could not be heard.

All in all, things worked out in our favor. The cons accepted the *Tab-O-Graph* for what it was; the Administration utilized it as a basis for extensive reports flattering to itself; and Tommy made

the first breach in the official barrier between himself and members of the Parole Board.

Official recognition of the magazine came quickly. By the time the third issue was ready for publication a portion of the State budget appropriation was allotted to the *Tab-O-Graph*, giving it an independent status.

This allowed us to acquire two additional staff members, new equipment, and larger quarters, fortuitously situated next to the commissary. I was transferred from the weave shop to the school company and put on the school payroll at ten cents a day.

With the added help, our connections in the key departments were extended and solidified. The kitchen, the commissary, and the storeroom were visited daily and the loot was impressive. We lived well but not ostentatiously — always conscious of how quickly rumor can snowball and of how eager the other cons would be to find fault with what we were doing. Of course we placated some of the important members of our community, winning their particular friendship with gratuitous gifts of coffee, milk, sugar, and occasionally meat, eggs, and tailor-made cigarettes.

The *Tab-O-Graph* did not change. According to some over-critical cons, it became worse. More and more eulogies of the officials, the Administration, the Department of Correction, and the Parole Board appeared. Abominations to the convicts.

But Tommy made progress. He wrote hundreds of letters which he knew would be thrown into the wastebaskets in the Correspondence Department. He persisted on the thousand-to-one chance that a slip-up would eventually occur and one letter would be sent to the chairman of the Parole Board. He slanted articles, editorials, and open letters into shameless appeals for consideration. Slowly, ineluctably, he had his way.

The day arrived when he was called to attend a Board session for a preliminary hearing. His correspondence with the Parole Board and Correction Department was resumed, and some eighteen months after the first issue of the *Tab-O-Graph* was distributed Beat-it Tommy Tassia was once again released on parole.

I was editor of the *Tab-O-Graph*.

TWENTY

WHEN I TOOK OVER AS EDITOR THE "TAB-O-GRAPH" HAD THE queer distinction of being not quite last in a national rating of prison publications — the Oahu Prison paper beat us out for last place by about one vote.

The Administration felt that this low rating was a reflection upon itself. I was called for talks with the warden and Prof, who wanted to do something about this problem. It developed that the Administration would not be averse to winning a higher rating for the magazine.

Prof argued, "The *Tab-O-Graph* is the only prison publication in the state of New York, and we certainly should be able to do better than this! New York State is generally regarded as the leader in prison matters and there is nothing in the *Tab-O-Graph* to indicate this. In fact . . ."

I took advantage of the situation by proposing that the format and policies of the *Tab-O-Graph* be radically changed. I said something to this effect: "We should put out a magazine which would really reflect the views of the men behind bars. A magazine which would be an unrestricted outlet for the convicts' criticisms, suggestions, and aspirations." Such a magazine, I felt, would accurately portray the sincerity, the understanding and encouragement of the Administration's effort to build a firm and workable basis for the then still controversial rehabilitation and resocialization program.

It was agreed that this was the sort of magazine Dannemora needed. Prof gave me his blessing and good wishes. The warden offered additional good wishes and carte blanche to run the *Tab-O-Graph* without official interference.

The go-ahead sign was given and I addressed my first editorial to my fellow cons:

Apparently there is a large percentage of the inmate body which is antagonistic toward this, their own publication. To them, each succeeding issue has become increasingly intolerable, until at present they have exhausted their supply of caustic comment.

We want to revive and encourage criticism, provided the critic has some constructive suggestion to offer, or better yet, if he has definite views as to what is necessary to make this magazine interesting. If the stories in it are rank, by all means let us know. If you think the humor rancid, drop us a line. If the articles and various departments do not agree with your ideas of what a magazine of this kind should contain, we ask you to inform us.

However, we think that, to be truly critical, one must first know whereof one speaks. If you must criticize, do so with some constructive aim. This is *your* magazine — you are entitled to a voice in its policy.

There are a large number of people outside who are interested in your welfare and your well-being. The public must be shown that a convict is a human — all newspaper editorials to the contrary — with the ambition and feeling of a human. How may these people who have your welfare at heart better demonstrate to a benighted public that you are human, than through the medium of your own magazine, wherein you are reflected in a light which vindicates their efforts in your behalf?

Among nineteen hundred inmates there must be *some* who can place one misspelled word after another to make sense. So, if you don't like the current crop of material, send in your own and if it is not used we will at least give you a damn good reason why.

The response was phenomenal. I got notes, manuscripts, suggestions from nearly everyone serving time. Everything was in the nature of a feeler, indicating that suspicion of the *Tab-O-Graph* was still very much alive.

Much of the doubts were dispelled when the next issue featured an editorial in which I quoted apparently contradictory statements made to the press, at lectures and talks by the director of the F.B.I. I underlined inconsistencies in quotations attributed to J. Edgar Hoover and, by innuendo, suggested he was not all he was cracked up to be.

The whole of the inmate body at Dannemora approved. The prison officials thought differently. But in keeping their promise to lay off the cons' magazine they did nothing beyond gently chiding me.

The initial intent of the J. Edgar Hoover editorial was to prove to the boys that I was taking a stand with them. This was their magazine. It was being run by a con who thought and felt and acted exactly like every other con. I did not consider juxtaposing quotations out of context and pointing out discrepancies that were obvious and had existed for a long period of time as anything more than a clever and effective way of lining myself up, publicly and irretrievably, with the segment of Dannemora which represented my real world. However, the fuss created by the J. Edgar Hoover editorial was such that I was convinced I had done a great service for the tens of thousands of voiceless men behind bars.

I considered the next issue a great improvement over what I was by that time referring to as the J. Edgar Hoover Issue.

Circumstances had developed a situation of which I took immediate advantage. Father Booth, the Catholic priest, had as a result of intercession on behalf of an inmate been relieved of his duties in the prison, and Father Booth was loved, respected, and admired by the whole of Dannemora's convict population. We knew him to be a regular guy. He played baseball and basketball on our teams. His language with us was free of any pious phraseology that might be construed as hypocritical, in fact he was not beyond indulging in the blunt, earthy speech which was our daily common tongue. He did not hide a fondness for an occasional drink.

"You can talk to Booth."

"Booth is a regular guy."

These were Father Booth's passports to our hearts and confidences. Father Booth managed to do many things to ease the strain and tension of prolonged confinement. He arranged visits for those who could not afford the long, expensive trip to Dannemora.

He organized unexpected, wonderful variety shows which were put on in the combination chapel and moving picture auditorium by N.V.A. professionals convalescing at nearby Saranac Lake Sanitariums. Boxing matches between inmates were his idea and many a grudge which might otherwise have been fatal was settled in three or four rounds on a purely sporting basis. He knew how to manage a pipe for a man who enjoyed one — or a pair of ear-phones for someone who had none. And he managed these things without fanfare; without an open or implied demand for gratitude.

My first personal contact with Father Booth occurred shortly after Tommy and I had the *Tab-O-Graph* under way. He had invited me to his office at Tommy's suggestion for the purpose of discussing material for the *Tab-O-Graph*. This turned out to be a poem written by a onetime lady parishioner of his, which technically had no place in a convicts' magazine. Father Booth agreed when I pointed this out to him but, "The lady is an earnest, gentle person," he said, "and I would consider it a great favor if you could see your way clear to polishing it up a bit and printing it."

He was so likable, so genial, his request could not be denied.

My understanding of poetry did not extend beyond the belief that the only necessary ingredient was rhyme. The meticulously typewritten sheet Father Booth handed me did not have even much of that.

I labored over it for several evenings and succeeded in working it into four quatrains of dull, just readable doggerel which was printed on the back cover of the following issue of the *Tab-O-Graph*.

Father Booth and the earnest lady were greatly pleased, the latter so much so that she immediately submitted several more of her works considerably wrapped up in a ten-dollar money order.

During the following months Father Booth introduced me to the poetic endeavors of two other ladies, each of whom was in the habit of expressing her appreciation of my appreciation of her work with a money order. From that time on, space was automatically set aside for "Outside Contributors." It was a happy arrangement. We enjoyed Father Booth's friendship and his generous appreciation which, over the months, we valued more than that of the poetically inclined ladies.

As I have already stated, affection for Father Booth was not

restricted to Tommy and myself. All the cons, and I believe officers, in Dannemora felt much as we did toward him. So when the word was passed around that he was being let out because he had tried to help a con he thought was innocent, indignation and resentment were acutely high, so high that the Administration was on the alert for violent protests.

At about this time I was told that the priest replacing Booth, a Father Hyland, wanted to meet and have a talk with me. I found Father Hyland a tall, handsome man, with the cultured speech of an Oxford don. We got along well discussing the prison, his work, and the *Tab-O-Graph* in a frank man-to-man manner, and after he had asked my advice about several problems that occurred to him I made the decision that he was a pretty nice guy and with proper coaching from the cons might easily deserve the affection of the inmate population.

Shortly thereafter I had been given a manuscript about Father Hyland, praising him for his devotion, his piety, and his love of humanity and designed to acquaint the cons with their new priest. My then associate editor was enthusiastic about this. It meant less work for us, he pointed out, and it would give us an immediate and solid "in" in the chaplain's office. That clinched the business — for the moment.

I had, a few days before this incident, submitted to the warden's office, for censoring, an article expressing the inmate population's feelings about Father Booth's dismissal from Dannemora. Soon after my talk with Father Hyland I was called to the Administration Building where it was suggested to me that the Booth article was no longer topical and that I might fill the space with the Hyland article. I did not argue the point, not wanting to provoke a positive and official proscription against the Booth article. I had already decided not to run the Hyland piece.

The third issue of the *Tab-O-Graph* handled by me as editor contained the Booth article and, because I was feeling stubborn about it, merely mentioned that a new priest, a Father Hyland, had been assigned to the prison.

The whole issue was confiscated and destroyed. I was called on the carpet and told that if I pulled one more caper like that I would be buried. I think what saved me from harsher discipline was the appearance, that very day, of an article in a prison ad-

ministrators' publication, praising the *Tab-O-Graph* for its healthy change of policy, its honesty, and its forthrightness. The article also raised our rating from almost last to a rank among the ten best.

The dummies for the two following issues were diligently censored and since no controversial matter was discovered the *Tab-O-Graph* came out on time, each time. Inmate reaction was better than favorable and I was restored to a position of confidence in the Administration Building. About this time I met and became very friendly with a pickpocket. In his middle sixties, Red was a genuine old-timer, having misspent better than half of a criminal life behind prison walls all over the United States and, as he loved to boast, "In Mehico too! Sonny, there's a country at's got the best cans in the world!" I enjoyed Red's colorful, fabulous stories that reached back to the robust eighties and nineties.

"Those were the days, sonny! Why, do you know that you could walk into any drugstore then, in any city in the States, and buy any amount of opium without a prescription? True! Smoke it anywhere you liked and never a word said by anybody!" Red was, among other things, an unreconstructed junky and loved most to talk of the day when he would again be able to contact his connection for stuff. I learned from him all the detail and ritual involved in opium smoking. I learned the difference between an end-saddle pipe and a side-saddle pipe and the advantages and disadvantages of each. I became familiar with tools used for smoking opium — the Yen Hsh'i Gow for scraping the bowl and the Yen Hauk, like a knitting needle, for rolling the pill. I learned to differentiate between the opium of the Orient and the opium of the Near East. I knew that the cooking lamp had to be fueled with a special kind of oil for best results and that a high hat was an oversized pill.

From Red I learned, too, that pickpockets work in groups and that they have a lingo peculiar to themselves. Pickpockets were cannons and each cannon mob was composed of specialists skilled in a particular phase occurring in the painless operation of separating a sucker from his poke. The jostler's task was distracting the victim's attention while the hook, with delicately sensitive fingers, extracted the wallet which would be immediately passed on to the leather glommer. The last-named operator's sole and all-important function was putting as much distance between himself and his partners and their victim in as brief a span of time as was

humanly possible — a wallet is evidence and an arrest cannot be made without evidence.

Professional pickpockets, according to Red, are interested only in cash. "After the dough is taken out the poke is mailed to the sucker — even if it's full of bonds or diamonds. We don't want to be tied to anything that can be traced and identified as stolen. Besides, you'd be surprised how many suckers don't beef once they get their pokes back!"

Wallets, purses, pocketbooks generally contain identification of some sort bearing the name and address of the owner. Pickpockets, conscious of the psychological effect of having even a part of what has been stolen returned, plus the pressing need to get rid of evidence of premeditated criminality, have devised a simple method for destroying such evidence: they drop it into the nearest mailbox.

No stamps or envelope needed. The United States Post Office takes care of everything!

Red invariably contrasted the wonderful olden days with the present. "Today, there's no more organization," he would say. "That's why you find more and more cannons in the can. Back in the old days if a cannon actually was sent up it was for thirty days — sixty days at the most. Now it's for years! You realize that? Years!"

Organization, in Red's lexicon, meant working with the Law. "In the old days when a mob blew into town the first thing they did was connect with the Law. Connections were wide (even all over the country. You cut the Law in for a percentage of the take and you got nothing to worry about. You got a territory in which to work, you got protection from other mobs trying to cut in on your territory, and you knew that the Law would fix any beefs that might be made.

"Once in a while," Red would elaborate, "the cops'd decide to clear up all complaints that'd piled up and you'd get a call from the station house to show up at such-and-such a street at such-and-such an hour and there'd be a dozen or so cannons waiting there for a cop to pick them up. You'd be brought to the poky and put in a line-up and in an hour or so you'd be back on the street working while the newsboys'd be yelling about the D.A.'s crusade against crime and the day's roundup of known criminals. Big laugh. Nothing ever came out of it. Maybe, maybe one cannon would be

sent up for thirty days, and all the books would be cleared and everything would start over again."

Red always ended his stories with the observation, "Nowadays, a guy that goes out on the cannon, or heist, or any racket, is a sucker! The only safe racket today is the pimps', priests', and politicians'."

He was cynical about the *Tab-O-Graph*. "You got a good job, that's all. But it doesn't mean anything. What the hell is the voice of the con? Nothing. Less than nothing. The people outside are too busy with their own affairs to worry about us and the people in here got us by the nuts. You try to do a good job with a cons' magazine and all it's going to get you is grief — mark my words!"

Friendship between Red and me had crystallized to the point where we were able to discuss, seriously, the lone hope that sustains all men in prison — escape.

"This can is tough," was Red's solidly reasoned opinion.

I knew it. Every man in Dannemora knew it. All of us knew, too, that when better locks were made we would be the ones to figure out how to open them. When stronger bars were fashioned we would be the ones to think of a way to break through them. When higher walls were built we would be the ones to plan a way over them.

Tough, yes. But not impossible. Red had figured a slick way out. "This can is tough," he repeated. "But Box A is a cinch."

Box A is situated a few steps down the road from the prison. Box A is not enclosed by walls and Box A has no guard towers manned by armed officers. Box A, medieval and dismal in the shadows of Clinton Prison's walls, is the post office and underworld designation for the New York State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, Box A, Dannemora, New York. Box A differs from Matteawan State Hospital in that it receives only such criminals as are declared insane *after* conviction — an important point. Technically, actually, literally, time by official decree ceases to function for the inmates of Box A. For edification, a convicted felon is sentenced to serve, say, twenty to forty years. After having served one year of that time in State prison, the institution authorities, for one reason or another, declare him insane. He is shipped off to Box A where he spends the next ten or fifteen or even twenty years, when he is declared cured of his insanity. He is shipped back to State

prison. There he learns that, technically and in fact, he has served only one year of his sentence. Sometimes the Parole Board considers the intervening ten or fifteen or twenty years. Sometimes it does not.

For a lifer, the existence of Box A is a twenty-four-hour-a-day threat to the lone, weak hope that someday, some way, he will find himself free once again. That is the way I felt about it.

In spite of the attractiveness of Red's offer and his conviction that the attempt could only be successful, I turned it down. Red regretted my decision but made no issue over it. He did point out that my participation in the plot would have made the whole business easier all around.

"I got a hacksaw," he said. "I figured out a way of getting it out of this joint. But I need help."

Red had half of a new hacksaw blade. The other half had been confiscated some weeks before when another friend of Red's had tried to smuggle it, taped to the sole of his foot, into Box A. "We figured that way was a sure thing, but," Red admitted, "we never figured they frisk as carefully as they do."

The whole escape scheme was built around that half of a hacksaw blade and Red had concocted and rejected a dozen plans for getting it into Box A. Now he had what he considered a perfect plan. He explained.

"When they bring you over there you're put into an isolation ward for about two weeks. That's when you're given all the bug tests and put under strict observation. After the isolation period you're put into either a regular ward or behind double doors — depending how the doctors decide. Main thing is, after you're out of isolation all your belongings are given to you — except your belt, watch, pen, or anything you might use to hurt yourself or someone else. That's how I figure this hacksaw scheme of mine is a sure thing. If you work it right, it can't flop."

My part of the job was simple. I had all the needed materials right in the *Tab-O-Graph* office and, since no officer had been assigned to the magazine staff, I was free from observation. Red gave me a book that had been sent by his sister — Van Loon's *Geography*. I took the back cover apart. In the fairly thick board I cut a groove of the exact thickness, width, and length of the hacksaw blade. I fitted the blade and covered the whole area with

an application of library paste which was carefully smoothed and allowed to dry. The cover was restored with great precision and when I handed the book back to Red on the following day only an expert bookbinder might have detected that the back cover had been tampered with. I was doubly pleased. I had done a good, craftsmanlike job, and I had participated, actively, in what promised to be a successful break for freedom.

I wished Red all the luck in the world. It was a deeply felt, honest wish. He told me he was going to make the bughouse that night. We shook hands and parted.

"Take it easy, Johnny."

"Take it easy, Red."

I was in my cell, working on the dummy for the next issue of the *Tab-O-Graph*. It was not yet ten o'clock, because I remember that the lights were still on, when the hall screw stopped by the cell door.

"Your buddy just blew his top," he said.

"Who?"

"Your buddy, Red. They put him in the cooler about five minutes ago."

"Christ! That's too bad. I'm sorry to hear it."

"Yup. Broke up his cell. Never figured he'd do it. Think he's putting on an act, or what?"

The screw was looking for information. The front office was aware that Red and I were friends and, being congenitally suspicious of convicts, it was hoped that I might have information as to why Red suddenly blew his top.

I played it dumb and successfully avoided any direct or honest answers to the officer's questions.

After lights out I lay awake a long time. Praying for Red. Praying for a happy ending to his plan.

The dummy for the sixth issue of the *Tab-O-Graph* was made up and had been approved by the prison censor, when a discussion with one of the fellows who had been invited for coffee on my court gave me an idea for what I thought would be a constructive and much-needed editorial.

The usual gripes about the food, the officers, the warden, the

commissioner, the governor, and the whole of an apathetic, vengeful society were being aired over coffee when our guest offered the surprising observation, "It could be that all these people just don't know any better. It could be that if they knew what our complaints were they might do something about it."

The suggestion was jeered as a matter of course, but he maintained his position strongly enough for me to get into a long, involved talk about it. It was still on my mind when we were locked in that night, and sometime before lights out I had developed the idea into a conviction that an editorial in the form of an open letter to the Parole Board was precisely what was needed.

The following day I talked it over with the censor, who agreed with me that an open letter like the one I proposed would be helpful toward developing a better understanding of the Parole Board on the part of the inmates, and perhaps a better understanding of the inmates on the part of the Parole Board.

Before the day was ended I had the open letter ready for printing. I asked three questions which I contended, correctly, were the chief concern of that portion of the inmate population which would one day be eligible for parole:

"What is parole?"

"What are the legal limits within which the Parole Board operates?"

"What are the standards which the Board uses as a measure to determine a man's eligibility for parole?"

Simple questions. Questions asked in the belief that they were fair, honest, and that the answers to them would provide for a better understanding between prisoners and the Parole Board and beyond that between convicted felons and the society to which they would ultimately be released.

Nothing in the questions to provoke violence, to stir up a riot. Nothing that might be interpreted as antisocial. Nothing in them that might indicate a typically criminal approach to a personal problem. Two thousand copies of the *Tab-O-Graph* containing these questions were mimeographed, stapled, mailed, and distributed throughout the prison. On the same day, after all this was done, I was keep-locked.

No warning.

No explanation.

I thought at first that somewhere along the line Red's escape plan had fouled up, that somehow my participation in it had been discovered. The days added up to a week — then two weeks. The only bit of information that I could get was what was making the rounds of the prison: I had been locked up on orders from the warden's office. That was all. Even the friendly guards, who ordinarily would know, were baffled. After the first week I felt certain that the isolation to which I had been condemned was not the result of my connection with Red. I understood enough about prison routine to know that, had an escape plot been uncovered, things would have moved with great speed.

About the second week a con relayed word to me that I had been taken off the magazine payroll. The *Tab-O-Graph* had a new editor.

TWENTY-ONE

I HAD BEEN RELEASED FROM ISOLATION AND TRANSFERRED TO THE school company when my friend Red and his friend MacAlister made their bid for freedom out of the State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. I knew the break was overdue and because of my connection with it I fretted a great deal about it. I was settling down, enjoying the work in the class, and elaborating on a plan which I hoped would eventually bring me to a legitimate release from imprisonment. I thought that if I taught myself the craft of painting, if I taught myself to be a reasonably good artist, someone on the outside with enough influence, enough determination, would say, "I've got to help this man!" My hopes, inflated by dreams, were such that I saw myself, in another year's time, being acclaimed, being forgiven, being restored to my family my friends, my freedom. I was impatient for action from Red and Mac. I was anxious for the whole business to be over and done with. Settled. Only then would I feel safe and only then would I be able to give full time to my hopes. That hacksaw blade and my tie-in with it would continue to worry me until the escape was written off in the official record.

One morning a gallery man brought me the word: Red and Mac had made their break the night before. By noontime the whole prison was babbling with rumors.

Red and Mac had made a clean break. Red and Mac had been fingered by a rat and nabbed before they could start the break. Red and Mac had killed three attendants on the way out. Red was killed on the way out. Mac was killed. They both were killed.

No one knew anything beyond the fact that a break had taken

place. The weeks that followed were unhappy ones for me. There was not a minute during the day or night that a footstep, a glance, a ringing telephone, did not bring panic. I knew the escape was being investigated. I knew that bars had been cut and a hacksaw found, and that hacksaw could lead right to my cell.

Months went by. The rumors about Red's escape petered out. I began to feel safe again.

Whitey Curtis met the Parole Board and was released and I took over the sign-painting class. I introduced poster design and illustration to my class, encouraging the students to experiment with technique and media. I experimented myself to check on what I had learned from the students. The class began to produce professional-looking posters and drawings. Everything was going smoothly and my plan for becoming an artist began to take on definite form.

When Red showed up as a student in my class I knew that everything was well as far as I was concerned. He had been in isolation for three months, he had received an additional sentence of seven years for attempted escape, and he had taken the rap for the hacksaw in the bughouse. We resumed our friendship and in time I got the full, tragic story about the break.

Making the bughouse was easy. Everyone in Dannemora knew the technique: break up the cell, toss things around, and yell for about half an hour. As easy as that. Two or three guards would come up to your cell, take you out, slap you around, and put you in the cooler overnight. Next morning the doctor would visit you in the cooler, ask you how you felt, and if you cursed and yelled at him you were on your way to the bughouse before lunchtime. That was all.

"Like I said," Red explained, "they sent my stuff over after I got out of the reception company. I connected with Mac and we went to work."

Going to work meant making two keys for opening two gates along the route Red and Mac had selected as offering the best chances for an uncomplicated escape. Going to work meant the laborious construction of a gun and ammunition. And going to work meant the making of a third key — an ignition key for a particular car.

"Kid, this MacAlister is a genius. A real, bonafide, genuine genius! Every doctor over at the bughouse knows it, admits it, and got it in his case record. There's no question about it. The guy is sensational. All he needs is one look at a key — and the next day he's got a duplicate carved out of wood. And the goddamned thing works! So we got no trouble with keys for inside the joint. Mac already has the car keys — months ago. We didn't need a rod but Mac is like a big kid, he's got to have one. 'How the hell you going to make a beat without a rod?' he wants to know.

"So he makes a rod."

Making the keys, the gun, the bullets took days of painstaking labor, of cautious conniving for bits of wood and metal and matches, of constant vigilance. The ever searching, ever alert attendants and the curious, simple, free-talking inmates presented countless problems for the two conspirators. The work had to be done secretly and in a full, busy ward secrecy was hard to come by.

"We couldn't pal around together or even talk to each other. Everybody — the attendants and the bugs — was suspicious of everybody else. Everybody jabbars too much. They're like a bunch of old whores."

Out of pieces of hard wood, out of sharpened scraps of metal which he picked up in the exercise yard, MacAlister made the keys and even tested the two for the gates in the building where he was imprisoned. He had no doubts about the ignition key. He worked quickly and he worked meticulously. Most important, he worked in secret — a few minutes in the empty toilet at night, a few minutes in the early dawn when enough light to see by came through the ward windows and before any of the others were awake. He worked deftly, he worked with a purpose, and in a short time his work was completed. The keys fitted.

He knew the gun would work. He could feel the bump it made under his mattress — everything would have to be hidden in another place tomorrow morning and in yet another place tomorrow evening, then another place and another place . . . not too many more places because he and Red were about ready.

He thought about the short length of pipe he had broken out of the mess-hall refrigerator. So far there had been no rumble about it — no indication of any suspicion. So far, so good. The pipe was his pistol now, pressing through the mattress into his side. The

pipe was his guarantee of freedom. Extra insurance. Carving and fitting a handle, filing down a piece of discarded bedspring on the concrete pavement of the exercise yard required only patience and ingenuity. That's all. The remarkable thing about the gun project was its conception. MacAlister had modeled the weapon after a photograph of a nineteenth-century derringer he had seen in a magazine. He had fashioned a wonderfully balanced, artistically finished, effectively lethal side arm out of the most diverse pieces of junk. The broken handle of a baseball bat became a grip and furnished enough material besides for the keys. A junked bedspring was converted into a firing pin, a mainspring, and a trigger, and the leftover pieces were ground down into rivets to hold the mechanism together. MacAlister loved the half-foot length of pipe chiefly because of its $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch bore. A pipe like the one he had stolen was priceless. A larger bore or a smaller bore would have presented so many problems that the whole project might have been discontinued. The bore was most important — because of the three steel pegs, patiently extracted out of the rungs of three separate steel chairs in the ward. Three beautiful, shiny objects that fitted snugly into his pipe. Three bullets. It was as though this gun project of MacAlister's was preordained when the unknown man who designed the chairs, pressed by the necessity of a low budget and high standard, conceived the idea of eliminating threading operations and screws by substituting simple, easily cut steel pegs to hold his creation together.

But a bullet is more than a steel peg and no one knew it better than MacAlister. A bullet is an explosive. A bullet is a container for an explosive, fashioned in such a manner that when the explosive is set off the full force of the blast will be directed against one end of the peg, propelling it through the pipe at a high speed, forcing the pellet out of the pipe with a thrust great enough to carry it through space, to cause it to penetrate any object which might be in its path.

The occupational therapy room in the New York State Hospital for the Criminally Insane was supervised by a gentle, understanding specialist, dedicated to his work. He was acutely aware of the propensity on the part of the hospital's inmates for accumulating things that belonged to others. Their childlike enjoyment of such accumulations was entirely harmless and their appropriation of

them completely innocent. The supervisor never made much of the disappearance of a piece of colored chalk or a sheet of paper, a brush, a block of wood or a pan of paint. Tools — such as knives, scissors, styluses — were a different proposition. He kept a close check on every such object he handed out. One day, when Mac-Alister handed in the tools and sheet of light-gauge copper on which he had inscribed a floral design, the supervisor noticed that a narrow strip of copper had been cut off along one edge and that the piece was missing. He checked the tools — they were all there. He decided to make no comment about the strip of copper. Mac-Alister, in his childlike fancy, probably thought he had a priceless metal which he would be using to trade for cigarettes. The supervisor sighed and pigeonholed the incident in a dark corner of his mind.

“He got this piece of copper” — Red held two fingers about an inch apart — “and he got a pencil. He rolled paper around the pencil until it was the exact thickness he wanted, then he tore the copper into three sections. There was nothing to it! He’d roll a piece of the copper around the padded pencil and Bang! he’s got a little copper tube. He folds one end over carefully and right on the rim he punches a little hole. It’s a shell! Just as pretty as you could want it. The guy’s a genius — no question of it! He’s got every angle figured.

“The powder is a cinch. We can get matches — the big wooden ones. That’s all he needs. You know what happens to a match when it gets wet? Well, that don’t worry Mac. We save up a load of them and he soaks every damn one, and when the heads are softened he scrapes them real fine and careful. He spreads them on a piece of paper and lets the mess dry and he’s got powder.”

Dried, the mess was cautiously broken up into fine particles. These were just as cautiously packed into the copper shells, after which the steel pegs were fitted into the open ends. The finished product, while lacking the precision of a machine-made cartridge, was as effective, as deadly, as any factory could produce.

“You’d think the primer for setting the goddamned thing off would be a tough nut, wouldn’t you? Well, Mac has the trick for making things seem easy. Remember my telling you about the little hole he punched in the rim of each shell? That was the gimmick. You put the shell into the gun barrel with the hole sticking up.

Just above the hole, Mac made a gadget for holding a match tip. That's it! You pull the trigger, the firing pin hits the match tip, the tip goes off right on the little hole, and that sets the powder off. Everything goes Bang! and somebody's killed or wounded."

With the hacksaw blade safely embedded in Van Loon's *Geography* — instantly available; with the keys completed and tested for workability; with the gun finished and ready for any emergency, Red and Mac agreed there was nothing to keep them in the bug-house any longer.

The least probable way out of the ward was through the barred toilet window overlooking a small recreation yard. This was the way selected by Red and Mac.

"That's why we picked it," explained Red. "Not even the bugs who were always talking about making a beat would consider it. The attendants and hospital officials were so certain no one would try that route they forgot about it. Once in a great while someone banged a hammer against the bars, testing them. The hardest part was getting to the bars for a few minutes. Someone was always wandering into the toilet to grab a smoke or meet his sweetheart. Anyway we managed it. The blade was a beauty — it went through the bars as though they were made out of wood."

It took Red and Mac five days of interrupted, concentrated work to cut through two bars. They used State soap to deaden the noise and fill the cuts against possible detection. The lookout man stood at a washbasin near the door, going through the motions of washing while keeping an alert eye on anyone heading in the direction of the toilet. Shutting off the water signaled someone's approach. When that happened the partner sawing through the bars would stop immediately and stand somnolently at a urinal.

"Cutting the bars was like clipping a poke from a drunk." According to Red, "The whole thing was a cinch. We got through the second bar in the afternoon and agreed there was no point in hanging around. We took off that night."

The midnight count was of particular importance to the escape-bound friends. After the count was phoned in to the main office and relayed to Albany, a busy movement started in the institution as the night shift took over. Each shift was supposed to check the count but rarely did so, having limitless faith in the fellows they replaced. Red and Mac had just as much faith in that kind of carelessness.

They rolled blankets and used extra clothes to fashion forms good enough to seem like sleeping men in the dim light of the ward. Their bedspreads, hurriedly draped over the beds, helped make the illusion more convincing.

The two men went through the toilet window right after the night man settled down at his desk with a newspaper. An eight-foot drop landed Red and Mac in the enclosed recreation yard. Red took a sawed-out window bar along — just in case. Though the yard was unlighted, the two men kept close to the building walls, making their way to the opposite side where a solid steel door opened without protest to the manipulations of Mac's home-made key. They were in a hall that led to the doctors' offices.

"We locked the gate behind us. We weren't taking any chances even though we knew we were pretty safe in the office building — the watchmen walked through the halls every hour or so, that's all, and we weren't stalling around. We made right for the entrance and Mac's other key worked like magic. We were out of the joint like we owned it."

They actually were out of the institution. They were free. The main highway, to Albany or to Canada, was only a few yards away and their plan included its use. They weren't walking though. They planned to travel in a fast car, to put distance between themselves and the bughouse, and only a hard-driven motor would do that.

On the narrow strip of land between the prison wall and the Hospital for the Criminally Insane the State maintained a row of dwellings which were rented out to the doctors working in the latter institution. Red and Mac made for the first of these, hurrying through the solid shadow of Dannemora's south wall.

For months Mac had studied every inch of ground over which he and Red were making their way. From a window in the ward he had watched every movement of the people living between himself and that strip of land which had come to mean so much to him. For months he had elaborated upon, modified, extended a mental picture of himself walking assuredly through the concealing blackness along the base of the prison wall. Second after second his dream was working out precisely as he had planned it.

He whispered to Red, "There's the garage. We go in through the window in the shadow."

Red heard him and nodded understanding. For the hundredth

time he was retracing every step, every detail of the escape to this point . . . it was moving along perfectly. Red was elated. He knew that the short drive from the garage to the highway would be, for Mac and himself, the most dangerous part of the escape. The sound of a motor, the sight of a car in that particular place, at that particular hour, should logically attract unwanted attention. Well, freedom was impossible without risk. He moved carefully behind Mac. The small window was open — a special sign that luck was with the two all the way. They crawled into the blackness of the garage, breathing heavily with excitement.

The car was a sedan. Red and Mac felt along its cold sides, adjusting themselves to its size and position. They opened the doors carefully, climbing onto the front seat with synchronized sighs of relief. This escape — their escape — was easier than either had dared imagine. Mac was behind the wheel. He pocketed the homemade gun and felt for the ignition lock. His fingers identified light switches. "No lights until we hit the highway . . ." The ignition lock took a little finding but the key he had made for it slipped in easily, turned without hesitation.

"It was one of the Ford models where you turn on the ignition and the starter goes right off — automatically. We damn near crapped when the motor started up. It sounded like a thousand machine guns going off at once! I don't know why the hell I never learned to drive a car. Mac was nervous and getting panicky when he put the car into gear. It sounded like a couple hundred more guns going off, and on top of that he forgot to release the brake. We both were scared stiff because of all the noise. All we could think of was to get to the highway. Mac cursed, feeling around for the hand brake, and when he finally found it, let it out in a hurry and stepped on the gas." The officer on duty in the guard tower on the southwest corner of Dannemora's wall heard the Ford's motor start but did not feel suspicious. The bug doctors were loonier than the inmates they handled, apt to do anything! The long, silent hours high on a narrow wall had conditioned him to talking to himself.

"The goddamned fool," he said to the night, "racing his motor like that!"

The crash that followed stirred him into immediate action. No matter how nuts bug doctors might be, smashing through a garage called for an investigation. From his post the alerted guard phoned

the Administration Building, then swiveled the huge searchlight glaring outside the post in the direction of the crash. The first building he picked out was a white, one-car garage out of which the smashed front end of a car protruded. A detail of guards was hurrying into the circle of light.

"I know. It's one for the books and maybe they shouldn't have let me out of the nut factory," Red concluded his story. "But the honest-to-Christ truth is that we never thought of opening the garage doors. Went right through them! Wrecked the car and ended up in the hospital ourselves."

Red got seven years added to his original sentence because of the almost successful escapade. He took it philosophically: "There's got to be a way out of this goddamned place and sooner or later I'll figure it. . . ."

TWENTY-TWO

NOT COUNTING THE PRISONERS WHO WORKED ON THE FARM OR THE lumber mill or were trusties and simply walked away, Clinton Prison at Dannemora boasts an almost perfect record as a maximum-security, escape-proof institution. During the past fifty years there have been many attempted escapes, breaks, beats, bids for freedom. Of the thousands of men involved, only one continues to enjoy an illegitimate freedom after having been sneaked out of Dannemora by a trusty friend who drove the prison supply truck. The others either surrendered to rationalization born of fear, or gave up, or were captured somewhere along the ever tempting path that leads over the wall. For those caught in the act of escaping from Dannemora, punishment had always been swift and severe. Even today, with less emphasis on clubs and more on psychology, the minimum punishment spreads anywhere from six months to seven years added to an already unbearable sentence. In addition, writing, visiting, and package privileges are withdrawn from the unlucky one caught doing something about his freedom. Then, of course, there is the ever present threat of "getting your lumps," which in official reports is blandly interpreted thus: "Upon being apprehended, the prisoner made another, desperate attempt at escape which resulted in his falling down a flight of stairs. He suffered a concussion of the head, broken arm and two fractured ribs," or: "Upon being apprehended, the prisoner became violent and had to be subdued. Two guards suffered bruised knuckles and the prisoner was hospitalized."

Not in every instance, however. In spite of the seriousness of escape as defined in criminal, correctional, and departmental codes,

occasional escapes or attempts at escape develop into ludicrous, humorous situations.

Tony was a couple of years younger than I and ordinarily we would not have become too friendly, but he came from the same block, went to the same school, and knew the same people. So, conforming to underworld convention, I felt an obligation to take care of him, to set him straight, to see to it that he was given the correct score. Tony had two messages for me when he arrived in Dannemora, one from a friend in Sing Sing and another from a friend from Fourteenth Street. The messages established a personal bond and I immediately began maneuvering to have Tony assigned to my class. He was not interested in lettering or poster design or painting. All Tony wanted was to meet the Parole Board and get out. Like all new mickeys, he was frightened and shy. On the third or fourth day an officer came to the classroom to pick him up for a work assignment. Tony was plainly unhappy but made no protest. He was being transferred to the lumber camp and before he left the room I reassured him about the job, told him to contact a friend who would look after him, and guessed that he would be given a soft job. Only the big, rugged guys worked hard at the lumber camp.

My guess was a good one. That evening the word was that Tony had been made water boy. I felt that his stay at Dannemora was going to be a comparatively brief and pleasant one.

But Tony lasted exactly one day as water boy at the camp. He was locked up in the isolation building the next evening and the prison buzzed with rumors which, when sifted, separated, and classified, indicated that Tony had attempted an escape.

The unusual thing about Tony's escape was that he was not punished for it. He was taken out of isolation the very next day and given a job as gallery man. No one but Tony knew exactly what had happened and the warden chose to accept Tony's version of what had happened.

Tony's conception of a lumber camp did not extend beyond a neat mental picture of carefully piled stacks of clean wood planks, the whole surrounded by traffic-burdened asphalt streets and tall buildings. When he reached the prison lumber camp he was dismayed to find it completely different from what he had imagined. For one thing, the trees bothered him. Not one tree grew on Thir-

teenth Street. Or Fourteenth Street. Or Twelfth or Eleventh streets. The few sparsely leaved, grimy, stunted examples of arboreal splendor that existed with amazing persistence in Tompkins Square Park on Tenth Street were all that Tony knew of trees.

When Tony was asked about the beat his explanation never varied. "What beat?" he would snarl. "I never made no beat! Them bastids tried to frame me, that's all! I get sent out ta this camp which is nothin but a forress an a screw hands me a pail an says for me ta get water fa the guys. Whatta hell do I know? I go the way the bastid points an there's nuthin but trees. Nuthin but trees! No road, no nothin. I look an look an the only place with water is a little river but who the hell drinks water outa a river? Ta tell you the truth I don't even know what the hell I'm lookin for. Maybe a shack with a sign sayin water or a faucet or hose or somethin. I dunno. These goddam Hoosier bastids don't tell me nuthin. I keep lookin and lookin an pretty soon I don't know where I am excep that I'm lost an there's no water and no road. Nuthin but these trees. An it's gettin late an I'm gettin worried. Sure enough just as I'm gettin ready to holler one a these big screws jumps out from behine a goddam tree an tells me ta stop or he'll shoot. Real mean. He's luggin a big cannon. A shotgun. He says, 'Where the hell ya think ya goin?' Fine question. So I says back ta him, 'Goin? I don't even know where I am!' He thinks I'm a wise guy an tells me ta shut up and get back ta camp. It's a good thing he's there ta show me the way or I'd still be out there with all them goddam trees!"

It was a good thing for Tony that the warden understood how a slum kid could be out of his element in a forest. Tony never realized how close he was to being handed an additional sentence for attempted escape. He still blames "them goddam trees!"

TWENTY-THREE

MY ORIGINAL COURT PARTNERS, NICK, LEFTY, AND DUKE, HAD been a long time home. I had a couple of fellow-members from the East Side on the court with me. Sam, the elder, was delegate at large and double shooter for the Mafia. He had the poor judgment to get caught beating up a member from Buffalo whose ambitions in the organization were beyond his ability to back them up. Sal had been convicted for plying a particularly lucrative form of blackmail involving obscene photographs upon which the heads of rotogravure ladies were superimposed. The brothers were a quiet, brooding pair who cooked marvelous Sicilian meals. Their presence gave prestige to the court.

Periodically Sal would concede to a compulsion to talk about his phenomenal successes in blackmailing famous movie actresses, society women, and ladies who had the necessary money, husbands, and fear of being exposed. During these uncontrollable confession binges, Sal liked to boast of his superexcellent connections with thieves and racketeers of every denomination, all over the world. He liked to boast, too, about his amatory adventures with his victims, models, and just women. His brother tried to discourage Sal from talking too loosely but his attempts never worked. Sam was the quiet one. Sam did not feel the need to talk about himself. Sam did not have to boast. Sam was a man with testicles. A man who had accomplished the things he had set out to do. A man who had earned the respect and admiration of his fellow men. Sam was a big shot who washed coffee cups, played pinocle, and stared blankly at the mountains on the other side of Lake Champlain — just like the rest of the guys.

Sam, the big, handsome, gray-haired condottiere, was the boy to whose care Charles "Lucky" Luciano was entrusted. Not that Luciano needed protection or guidance or money or friends. Luciano had an abundance of those necessities. But Luciano did need someone he knew. Someone reliable. Someone respected. Someone liked and, above all, someone with a less than lurid reputation. Sam was the answer.

Lucky Luciano, Little Joe Donatelli and George Vincenti arrived in Dannemora with forty-seven other convicts. Earphones, cigarettes, newspapers, and magazines were waiting for the three. Waiting, too, were a court and friends.

I knew of Lucky in a slightly more intimate way than most people. He came from my block. From the East Side. I had been hearing stories about him since I was this high. Everyone on Thirteenth Street thought and spoke of Luciano with admiration. He had helped many of his neighbors.

Luciano was a slender man. Average height. Sallow complexion. Dark brown hair and eyes. Cast in right eye, giving his face a sinister expression when in repose. He came up to the court smiling. A shy, friendly, warm smile. He had nothing to say after shaking hands all around.

George Vincenti had none of the stigmata of the criminal. A plump, apple-cheeked youngster with a winning smile and happy eyes. Not much of a talker though. Like Luciano, he sat quietly at the table, beaming good will and friendship.

Little Joe was different. He, too, sported a warm smile, but you felt the snarl behind it. He was voluble in a strange way — speaking constantly without revealing a thing. Through all his talk ran a countercurrent of questions, or probings for information.

I took to Little Joe immediately. I liked him with a cautious affection — the kind you give to a half-tamed tiger. I played handball with him and I played dominoes and pinochle with him. We used hundreds of hours pacing up and down the court, discussing politics, women, religion, society, and art. These discussions were difficult and argumentative until I realized that the only way Joe could show respect was by ruthless teasing. The more contrary he became, the more he agreed with your opinions.

Joe was assigned to work in the dye shop, in the basement of the

school building. Vincenti was sent to the weave shop. Luciano was given a job in the laundry.

Life in prison picked up tempo after the arrival of Luciano and his partners. Cons and guards were constantly planning accidental meetings with Lucky. Involved were curiosity, a desire to enhance prestige, or a plea for aid. Everyone around Luciano was approached at one time or another to intercede, to introduce, to pass on information. There was no need to organize a private grapevine. Information, trivial and important, was offered daily.

Among the inmate population he was always referred to as "Lucky." The guards were about evenly divided between "Lucky" and "Luciano." His friends called him Charley.

Though other convicts, with less influence and less cash, availed themselves of special privileges, wearing outside shirts and tailor-made trousers, having special meals in their cells and hired help, Luciano for one reason or another refused all such favors. The psychology was excellent. He was never pointed out as a big shot because he wore a white shirt or had a guy cleaning out his cell. He was one of the boys. Just another con.

Luciano has probably been as great a favorite with reporters and writers as Marion Davies or J. P. Morgan. I had read or heard things read about him before I reached my teens. The general outline was that of a ruthless, conscienceless criminal. Yet among his fellow cons Charley was highly regarded, respected, and defended with ardor.

They told the story of the gray, old convict who had no money and no friends and hardly any hope of seeing the outside again, who came to the court to see Charley. He explained to Luciano that he was in prison on a bum rap and that only the week before he had contacted a witness who could clear him. All he needed was a lawyer and briefs. All he needed was seven hundred dollars.

About one month later the old man was back on the court — for the last time. He was saying good-by. He was on his way home and he had come up to thank Charley for helping him.

Most of the talk in the shops, in the cell blocks, and on the courts is based on reminiscences of crimes committed, seductions perpetrated, and robberies and murders planned for the future. After a year or five years or ten years, interest in these stories

tends to fade, you listen without hearing, you know the endings, the beginnings, the middle parts, and you just don't give a damn. So you made talk about other things. About politics, about religion, about books. Charley was not much of a talker but he was a flattering listener. Little Joe and I enjoyed having him join us in our walks and frantic discussions. From the very beginning we had agreed that politicians were a greater danger to the well-being of society than whores and thieves. That the clergy of all religions were an even greater menace. So we talked about books and about paintings and buildings and sunsets. We talked about anthropology, about flavoring tea with yak butter, psychoanalysis, and non-objective painting. Charley walked up and down with us, listened, made infrequent comments.

I copied a photograph of Joe's sister. I used oil paints and a large canvas woven in the weave shop and primed with white lead. The photo showed only the head and shoulders, but in the painting I extended the lines to depict the full figure of a girl attired in her great-great-grandmother's wedding gown — Joe's sister had been married a short time before. The completed copy was fairly accurate, restrained in color, and satisfying in composition. It was a good decoration and a recognizable painting of the girl. Little Joe was delighted. Charley was impressed. Everyone on the court was impressed and I was delighted because of the happy reaction my painting had provoked. Being uninhibited sentimentalists, all of us practically drooled over the painting. I thought it a good time to exhibit an unfelt modesty by pointing out how much better it would have been if I had good canvas, good paints, good brushes. Everyone nodded his head in understanding. The painting remained a success, however, because I was asked to do at least three others.

Thanksgiving Day is a big day in prison. No work. Special food packages from home. A real turkey dinner in the mess hall. Movies, a football game between the prison's two best teams, and a feeling of good will all around. On the court everyone received holiday packages and a tremendous feast was planned. Friends from other courts were invited and everyone was excited in a good way. We spent all morning drinking coffee around a huge oil drum that glowed hot with fire. Everyone took a crack at stirring the macaroni sauce. At offering unasked advice to Sam — about the quanti-

ties of spices used, the quality of the tomatoes; the sausages, the salamis, the tenderloin, and the chops. The two tables on the court were piled high with large cardboard cartons bulging with roasted and stuffed turkeys and chickens. With boiled hams and smoked hams and baked hams rich with cloves, pineapples, and maraschino cherries. With salami, pepperoni, and strings of fat sausages. With stuffed figs and nuts and seed cookies. With the heavy, creamy pastry of Naples and Palermo. With slabs of lasagna, pots of broccoli and containers of yams and spinach and celery and finocchio. And all the corners and in-between spots were packed with redolent spheres of Provolone, Gouda, wedges of Gorgonzola, and squares of Mozzarella. There were apples and bananas and tremendous purple grapes and there were sugar-coated almonds and sweet and bitter chocolates.

There was also a box for me — crammed with tubes of paints and brushes.

Charley said, "When a guy wants to do a thing, he should have the right equipment for doing it."

Christmas packages from the chaplains' offices had become a tradition in Dannemora. Even the men who gave theirs away to less fortunate buddies looked forward to a bundle from the priest or the minister. Christmas 1941 was going to be a rough one on the cons. The attack on Pearl Harbor had channeled so much of the annual philanthropic impulse into war activity that packages made up of donations would not materialize. War, we knew, meant greater restrictions for us, more security regulations. And war meant less food in the mess hall, less food in the commissary, and less food from home. Christmas packages, from any religious denomination, became important. Christmas packages meant food and food was becoming a greater luxury than ever. Father Hyland knew that a heavy percentage of his congregation existed only because of the packages. Father Hyland was worried and he told his troubles to some of the cons working for him. He got loads of advice and suggestions but the suggestion that paid off was the whisper that Luciano might have an idea or two.

Charley gave Father Hyland several names and telephone numbers and on Christmas Day three trucks arrived in Dannemora after an all-night drive from New York City. They carried maxi-

mum loads. Loads of fruits and candies and cigarettes. It was not a bad Christmas.

The cons who knew Charles Lucky Luciano best, swore he was not a pimp or a procurer or a white slaver. They admitted he might have been many other things but insisted he was not a whore-master, even though the public record showed that he had been convicted of compulsory prostitution.

Jenny the Scow and Cokey Flo boarded up their respective bordellos after Luciano's conviction. Jenny and Flo took a trip to Europe.

The rumor was that twenty-five grand had been deposited for each of the girls and twenty-five grand is a lot of green stuff to a girl who has been accustomed to two-dollar deals most of her life. Maybe the twenty-five grand was exaggerated. Maybe the twenty-five grand was real. Maybe the twenty-five grand never was anything but malicious imagination. But Jenny the Scow and Cokey Flo did go to Europe.

At one time, his convict friends said, both girls admitted that their sole connection with Charles Lucky Luciano was at third or fourth hand. Each had rented her bed to a guy who knew a guy who knew a guy who knew Luciano.

George Vincenti swore that he, too, had been promised a paid vacation to Europe. And a twenty-five-thousand-dollar bonus. All he had to do, he said, was testify that he worked for Luciano as a strong-arm boy.

George knew lots of whorehouses in Brooklyn and Manhattan. He worked as a free-lance muscle man, shaking down pimps, madams, and girls on the turf. He was a shakedown artist, under arrest, whose racket was putting the muscle on cat joints.

George swore that at first he refused to testify against Luciano, then he was indignant, then he argued, then he became uncertain. He swore it was suggested that all pending charges against him would be dropped if he agreed to testify for the State.

Cokey Flo took the oath and testified that Luciano supplied her establishment with girls.

Jenny the Scow took the oath and testified that Luciano had supplied her establishment with girls.

Immediately after the trial both girls took a trip to Europe.

George Vincenti took the oath and, to the consternation of the

prosecution, testified that an effort had been made to bribe him into giving perjured testimony. George took a trip, all right — a trip to Dannemora.

In prison each man gets to know the other man. You get to know the man, not the name. You get to know the man, not the gesture. You get to know the man, not the things he says.

I knew Lucky Luciano a good many years and I knew Charley Luciano. Lucky is the man about whom so much has been written. The gangster. The racketeer. The boss of the Unione Siciliano. The overlord of crime. Lucky is a facet of the man. Lucky is a restricted view, a detail of the whole.

Charley, too, is a facet, a detail of the man. And Charley adds to the perspective of Luciano, because Charley is average and Charley is human. Charley is the man who suffers with the beggar, who helps the blind man at the curb. Charley is the man who enjoys the sight of a good-looking woman, who imagines he can beat the ponies, and who believes, ingenuously, that we are all God's children.

TWENTY-FOUR

A MAN CANNOT HIDE IN PRISON. WHEN HITLER'S SCREECH CAUSED the world to cower, the reaction in Dannemora was one of admiration. Hitler became the symbol of the convicts' hatred of a society capable of creating prisons for its members. When Hitler's SS troops marched into Poland there was a sustained ripple of elation. The guy had guts. He was showing the rulers of the world — the hypocrites — that they were not as powerful as they thought. When one of Hitler's representatives was sent to Dannemora — for having robbed the Fuehrer's faithful in America — a small group of the more headstrong received him with all the joy and offers of friendship and help to which he was entitled as official leader of the German-American Bund. The majority of the cons, however, reacted to his presence with restraint — even the Jew mob, which was considerable and boasted many tough members. Most of us waited to find out more about him — waited to find out, specifically, whether or not he was a louse.

Fritz Kuhn was given a job mixing chemicals for coloring the textiles produced in Dannemora. He had what was considered one of the best jobs in the dye shop. He did not mix too much with the inmates and he was respectful but distant with the guards. He became a member of a court, the occupants of which were known as loud, voluble, aggressive admirers of Hitler and the Nazi concept of social order. He was careful not to antagonize anyone — punk or screw, Negro or Jew. He assumed a protective neutrality which was so successful that in a short time Fritz Kuhn became just another number. He was a heavy-set, watery-eyed individual. Soft-spoken. His nose was bulbous. He was not pretty. He was not

ugly. Fritz Kuhn looked like every description of the ordinary German who loved his beer and kraut and wursts and all the heavy foods with which the German stuffs himself. He was not a louse in the sense that he squealed on any of his fellow cons. He was not a louse in the sense that he needled one con into trouble with another. He was not a louse in the sense that he did not love his family or his country. Had he been a rat or a troublemaker or a traitor to his family or fatherland he most certainly would have been marked a louse. But that kind of lousiness is superficial. That kind of lousiness is an accretion of the greater lousiness of which mankind is capable.

I knew little about Fritz Kuhn. There were times when we would say hello to each other and there were times when we would ignore each other. There were times when I needled him about Hitler's apparent timidity when dealing with Stalin and there were times when he needled me about America's apparent fear when confronted with Hitler's might. And there were times when we played chess. Nothing important, nothing friendly, nothing even neutral.

Kuhn's friends never complained but they all agreed that his behavior was strange. For one thing, whenever Kuhn received a package from home, he took it to his cell and enjoyed it by himself. Yet, when his friends brought their packages out to be shared on the court, Fritz never refused a portion. And in the summer-time, when we were allowed to buy ice cream, Fritz never bought more than one pint, which he ate quickly, furtively, and by himself. He never refused a share, no matter how little, which might be brought to his court. For that matter, he never refused a share of anything that might be offered wherever he might be. And in prison where everything — hope and disappointment, luxury and crap — is shared, Fritz's attitude was abnormal.

The first time I played chess I didn't know a gambit from a rook. A friend spent part of one Sunday morning explaining the relative merits of the pieces we had set up on the board. He explained the directions in which they were permitted to move and he told me their names.

From then on all I could do was watch him or one of the other enthusiasts who came up to the court every weekend to play for five or ten dollars a game. None of them would play with me. I was too much of a sucker.

Fritz Kuhn came up to the court every weekend. To watch and to play a game now and then. Fritz Kuhn was one hell of a good chess player. He beat every player on the court. He never gambled but the others enjoyed the opposition he gave.

Fritz was willing to play chess with me. His temperament was such that he was willing to beat me ten to fifteen games a day — a fair indication of how unevenly we were matched. . . . He never offered to even the balance of power by reducing his strength. Actually he could have beaten me with just his pawns. Fritz enjoyed playing with all his might. Never once did Fritz indicate to me that a particular move might be a bad one — might be my undoing. From the very first game we played, before I knew that a pawn could be advanced two squares on the first move, Fritz Kuhn played against me as though I were a grand master.

He set traps for me before I knew traps were possible. He maneuvered me into untenable situations before I was aware maneuvers were possible. He played with arrogance, with a brutal, ferocious determination. He played to win. With Fritz Kuhn the fun was not in the playing, the fun was in the complete demolition of his opponent.

We played all that summer and fall. My game, instead of improving, seemed to get progressively worse. We even played weekdays when the recreation periods were hardly long enough for one game. Fritz Kuhn beat me day after day, week after week. He beat me before we set up the pieces. I resented, I hated, I loathed that sonofabitch. My guts knotted every time I sat down to play him. He kept beating me. With ease. He wore me down, from hoping for a draw, to hoping merely to prolong the game.

He wore me down to where I welcomed the bitter winter cold which made playing so uncomfortable that only the fanatic enthusiast would try an occasional game. He wore me down so that I took to missing the yard, hurrying to my cell instead.

Fritz Kuhn's absolute mastery over me in chess was so humiliating that even the thought of freedom took second place. I was determined to beat him. I was obsessed with the need to beat him. I bought and borrowed books on chess. Every moment that I was not in the classroom I spent in my cell, setting up the chessboard and playing over and over the great games of past and present grand masters. I read criticisms and analyses of every move of

every great game. I memorized the games. I began playing with fellows in cells within hearing distance, calling out each move as I made it and following my opponent's shouted countermove. I won my first game. Then another. Another. I knew that by the time spring dragged around again I would be able to beat Fritz Kuhn. That was all I wanted — one game.

December 1942. The Parole Board convened at Dannemora during the first week of the month. Fritz Kuhn was among the inmates interviewed and the day after the meeting the word making the rounds of the prison was that the Little Fuehrer was to be released. The federal authorities wanted him for transfer, in January, to an enemy alien camp in Texas.

I was not happy for Kuhn chiefly because the transfer was a tremendous break for him. Besides, all my plans for revenge were shot to hell. The Sunday before Christmas opened with a bang. The temperature was well above freezing; a heavy, steady snowfall covered the raw ugliness of Dannemora. A radio news commentator announced excitedly that the Nazi armies were taking their first beating from the Russians; that the governor had issued thirteen commutations to prisoners in New York State; that Fritz Kuhn was to be transferred to an enemy alien camp and, incidentally, that the death of Kuhn's son on the Russian front had been confirmed by Berlin.

I thought it would be a good day to spend out in the yard. The yard was snowed under. We had to break paths up to the courts, then clear the courts to get at the firewood and coffeepots. An overwhelming majority of the cons preferred the warmth of their cells to outdoor recreation and the yard seemed deserted. We were so busy clearing the court, building a fire, and preparing coffee that no one noticed Fritz Kuhn coming up to pay us a visit. His court was empty and he must have been lonely and miserable. He was dejected. And he was every bit as much of a bastard as he had ever been. He had come to see me. He had come with his teary eyes and great hemorrhoid of a nose steaming above a tight mouth.

"You haff heard they are shipping me to a concentration camp in Texas?"

I have heard that he was going to Texas.

"You know my commissary account is closed," he went on, "and I have two, three, maybe four weeks more to stay here. I

have only few cigarettes left and I think maybe we can haff an agreement."

The agreement, it developed, was that I should put up four cartons of cigarettes against a chess set that had been made for Kuhn by a faithful Bund member and presented as a token of devotion. I knew the set. It was a beauty and worth many times the five dollars in cigarettes I was being asked to risk. But the whole agreement had the stink of a rat's nest. Fritz's idea was that we should play two best out of three, winner take all. It was a fine idea — for Fritz. It was taking candy from a baby. It was like betting on a one-horse race. Found money and a sucker is born every second — that was me. I went for it. I figured the five dollars would be worth the hard time I felt I could give him.

The first break was mine. Fritz knew nothing about the chess books, the hours of practice, and the games played in the cell blocks. Added to that was my getting first move. It happened that the set we were playing with was colored black and red. I kept Fritz aware of the continuing news announcements from the eastern front, with each move I made.

"Here comes the Red Army, Fritz! You know what that means. . . ."

It was snowing so heavily that we had to clear the board every few minutes in order to see the squares. The game went slowly and I kept up a constant chatter about the defeats Hitler's armies were suffering and about the cruelty of the Russian peasant turned soldier.

"You know how they are, Fritz? Like animals. I can imagine what they do to the fliers they bring down . . . after all the bombings and strafings. They must be tortured for days and weeks. Those Russians make Genghis Khan look like an amateur. . . ."

Fritz's son had been shot down on a flight behind the Russian line and my running commentary and persistent reminder of the fighting on the eastern front did not help Fritz's ability to concentrate. I won the first game. Not easily or neatly, but I won. Fritz was so stunned he could do no more than shake his head in disbelief. It hadn't worked out the way he had planned.

While uncertainty still floated in his eyes I set the pieces for the next game. We had better than an hour left before lunch and only about half that time was needed for the second game. I beat him again.

I can say only this much for Fritz Kuhn. Until the moment he walked out through the main gate of Dannemora he never once complained about the tactics I used to beat him. The constant jabbering, I know, was infuriating. The derogatory remarks about the German Army and the repeated, oblique references to his dead son were cruel and vicious and unfair. But in Fritz Kuhn's book, taking full advantage of every circumstance without regard for morals or ethics was not only justifiable but admirable — providing the end was attained. Exploiting his hurt over his dead son and his humiliation over what was happening to his Fatherland was smart, was clever.

He sent the chess set up to my classroom first thing the following morning.

From that time on until he left for Texas handcuffed to a federal marshal, Fritz assured me over and over that if it had not snowed the morning we played, that if it had been warmer, that if it had been afternoon instead of morning, I could never have beaten him. He could not concede defeat to what he believed was an inferior opponent.

Funny guy.

A first-class bastard.

TWENTY-FIVE

ONE DAY IT WAS SPRING. THE PRISON WAS SHUT DOWN AND EVERY inmate locked in his cell. The shops, the mess hall, the hospital, the church, each cell block, each cell, each con, was systematically, meticulously frisked. The yard and every court in it was carefully frisked. Every building, every square foot of ground inside the prison walls was gone over by teams of screws.

Spring-cleaning time in Dannemora.

Every year in the spring the prison would be frisked, washed down, polished. Spring ended a three-month hibernation when Dannemora was hidden under great snowdrifts; when the temperatures were too low for anyone to want to do anything except crawl into the warmth of his blankets or hug the radiators in the shops. Spring ended winter-long grudges and bad feelings and provoked new grudges and bad feelings. The solid, cold hopelessness following Christmas and New Year thawed and evaporated during the new season.

The day after spring cleaning trucks carted the accumulation of the past twelve months to the incinerator. Newspapers; magazines; old socks; cardboard cartons; empty peanut butter, jam, and pickle jars; odd pieces of wood, wire, and metal; torn underwear and shirts; shoes without soles and soles without uppers; old birthday and Christmas and Easter cards. The trucks worked all day hauling an incredible amount of useless junk that could have meaning only to those without possessions of any kind. Tons of litter that cluttered up the space under thousands of beds. Tons of trash that invited bedbugs and roaches. Tons of waste that could not be

thrown out by the cons because it represented the comfortable detritus of normal living.

One special truck was always assigned to deliver contraband to the Administration Building where the stuff would be carefully gone over, labeled, and tagged with the name of the con in whose cell, or upon whose person, it was found. Contraband consisted of prison-made knives; scissors; hacksaw blades; drills; sledge hammers; shovels; suspicious pieces of metal that could be fashioned into grapples, crowbars, clubs, or guns; long lengths of rope or braided cord that might be used for scaling walls or simply for committing suicide; electric stoves; wax stoves; oil stoves; hypodermic needles; narcotics of all categories; obscene photographs and drawings; obscene stories and poems; dice; money.

Contraband meant more time for those who possessed it and contraband meant more work acquiring new contraband for those who had to have it.

There was the guy who had three crates of eggs and one hundred and fifty pounds of coffee in his cell. The screws were puzzled and after snooping around a bit discovered that the mess-hall store-room was minus at least that much in eggs and coffee.

There was the guy who explained that he had to have a knife, a fifty-foot length of rope attached to an iron grapple, and ten one-dollar bills, because he was working on an invention.

There was the guy who got ninety days for possession of one pair of women's stockings, a pair of lace panties and brassiere to match, and a tube of lipstick. All articles, he swore, were planted in his cell by some evil-minded, malicious con.

And there was the guy who got ninety days because an extra pair of prison-issue pants was found in his cell.

But spring-cleaning time was good. We looked forward to it chiefly because we could blame the screws for taking from us mostly what we knew to be useless trash. Spring, more than January first, meant the beginning of another year. And one spring I realized I had been in prison over twelve years. More than one hundred and forty-four months. More than six hundred and twenty-four weeks. More than four thousand three hundred and eighty days. That's a long time.

TWENTY-SIX

ONE DAY THE OFFICER IN CHARGE OF THE SCHOOL COMPANY HANDED me two assignment slips and several orders:

"I want you to place these men at those desks." He indicated two desks in the far corner of the last row. "If you have anyone else using those desks, seat them elsewhere. I want you to keep away from them, they're not being placed in your class to learn sign painting. And I want you to discourage any of the pupils from getting friendly with them. These two guys are dangerous." The officer in charge of the school company pointed to the slips. "They're agitators. Troublemakers. They've just been released from solitary and are being put in your classroom because they can be watched every minute here. Can't even trust them in their cells."

Fratello and Iodine were tough guys with bona fide reputations. Many of the years each still had to serve had been accumulated in prison. Their approach to peaceful existence was simple, dogmatic — stick a knife into a guy and you never have trouble with him.

Fratello was an old friend. I had bought and stolen many pounds of fruits and vegetables from his father's pushcart. Iodine was a stranger. He came from the West Side, from Greenwich Village.

They were hostile, bugged-up when they were brought to the classroom. Fratello would not look at me. The first couple of days they spent in glaring hate at the screws who kept constant vigil at the long row of hall windows that looked in on the sign-painting class. The tension in the classroom made work impossible. Everyone was overalert, nervous, jumpy.

What bothered me most was Fratello's attitude toward me. He

refused to acknowledge my greeting. He would not look directly at me. That was bad. That was the attitude directed at an enemy. I had to do something about it.

I gave a talk. Nothing about sign painting or poster design. Nothing for the pupils, although I stood in front of the blackboard and directed my remarks in their direction. I spoke to Fratello and Iodine. The screws looking in through the windows probably thought I was giving a lecture. With the classroom door closed, they could not hear a word I said.

I said, "We've got to get something clear. I didn't ask to have you assigned to the school or this class. That was the warden's or the P.K.'s idea and I'm glad they had it. I'm glad you're in the class. Everyone in the joint knows the screws are trying to give you a hard time, but what the hell can we do about it? Why take it out on us? And especially you, Fratello, why take it out on me? You know goddamned well that I'm with you and you know goddamned well that I don't like screws any more than you do.

"They're doing it to you without vaseline and they're waiting for you to yell. I know something they don't know. I know they won't get a peep out of you or Iodine no matter how much of a hosing they hand you. And every guy in the joint knows it. For Chrissake, don't you know that when one of us gets a hard time in here all of us get a hard time? Sure you know it! And you know that we can't do a thing about it. I'm asking you, would it do any good if I went out and stuck a shiv into that sonofabitch out there? That's all I got to say."

Next morning Fratello entered the class with an abrupt "Hiya!" Iodine nodded his greeting.

Soon as I got the class under way I went over to Fratello's desk. I asked how he was doing; whether a mutual friend was taking care of him with papers and magazines; whether he needed anything in the way of smokes.

The guard at the window watched and I knew a report would be sent in before the day was over.

Fratello and Iodine had left their hostility outside the classroom. I spoke to them for about ten or fifteen minutes, then went around to the other pupils, inspected their work, then back to the two outcasts.

Iodine spoke for the first time. "Ya gonna get yaself in a jam

if ya get too buddy-buddy with us." He said it with pride and he said it with concern. He said it, too, because he wanted to know exactly what stand I was taking. I let him know without hesitation.

"Iodine, nobody — nobody — Jesus Christ himself, can't tell me who to talk to, who not to talk to!"

That's the way it was. Iodine sensed it and the officer in charge of the school company, looking in through the window, knew it. All the cons knew it and all the screws knew it.

When the morning session was over Fratello and Iodine bade me "Take it easy!" The Officers, too, bade me take it easy. "Remember, they're bad actors and they'll get you in a swindle if you're not careful!"

The sign-painting class was the largest classroom, in area, in the prison school. It was bright, sunny, and, with the pupils' work hung on all available wall space, colorful and exciting. Situated directly opposite the entrance to the school floor, it presented an impressive showcase to the officials and outsiders whose curiosity and interests impelled them to make a tour of the prison. The prison Administration's view, a carefully considered and correct view, was that the sign-painting class was the most important unit in the school. It was attractive and, from the standpoint of vocational education, the only practically effective class.

I was proud of my class and prouder over the obvious enjoyment and satisfaction the guys got out of it. The sign-painting class was the only class that had a waiting list of men who wanted to become members of it.

We had little equipment and much ingenuity. Things worked out well. The pupils took turns using brushes, rulers, and T squares. Paint was always a problem in terms of quantity and variety of colors. Classroom periods were never long enough and many of the projects were worked upon and completed in cells. But in spite of all handicaps and annoyances from a minority of screws and cons who thought education for hoodlums was the most extravagant, pointless waste of time and energy, we turned out many fair, and several good, sign painters.

My approach to teaching was starkly simple. Each newcomer to the class was given a large sheet of paper, four thumbtacks, pencil, ruler, and T square. He would then be told to measure off half-inch squares, rule them in, and use them as a guide for drawing in

a simple block alphabet. That done, he would get a lettering brush and paint with which he was to fill in the penciled outline of the ABCs. I'd help. I would show him how to hold the brush; how to load it with the proper amount of paint; the direction of the brush strokes; and the position for his wrist.

I felt that a thorough understanding of the fundamentals of lettering and a knowledge of the use, care, and handling of the tools was essential and all that was necessary. I passed on all the information I could gather from available books, pamphlets, and trade magazines dealing with the subject. When the pupil was able to handle a brush with some confidence, and make letters without the help of squares or ruler, he was on his own. From that point on the making of a good sign painter rested solidly on practice.

I believed in individual instruction and spent most of my time with the newcomers and those with special problems related to lettering. I felt, and feel, that each man has a specific personality facet that facilitates contact and understanding.

The logical, inevitable result was that my relationship to the pupils was more that of a friend than teacher. I acted as lookout while someone sneaked a smoke in the classroom; I hid and passed contraband; I refused to discourage coffee drinking or spaghetti eating during class hours; I participated in coffee drinking and spaghetti eating during class hours. I stole school supplies for anyone who asked; and I taught lettering. Every man who ever attended my class knew the difference between a well-constructed letter and a poorly constructed letter; between a banner brush and a rigger; between good spacing and poor spacing. Every man in my class knew at least as much as I about the evolution of the ancient Roman alphabet into its present-day forms.

That included Fratello and Iodine. At first I spent a lot of time with them just gabbing — beefing about the law and the prison, skylarking about the future when we would be free and reminiscing about the good old days when we were free.

Neither of my new pupils gave any indication that he intended or might want to learn how to paint the alphabet. Neither of them spoke to any of the other pupils and their attitude toward the screws remained inflexible. They hated screws with every heartbeat, with every breath, with every thought.

We were talking about the Boys' Club and P. S. 40 and the

market on First Avenue where Fratello's old man had a pushcart. Fratello was boasting about how much he held out on his father. Five, ten dollars a day — lots of money for a kid and lots of money back in the middle twenties.

"He never missed it, he was making so much. That was some spot he had." Fratello was talking to Iodine and he turned to me for confirmation. I went along with him and we really laid it on for Iodine's special edification.

"I usta help him every day after school and all summer long. He made a fortune in that spot. Right off Thirteenth Street. . . . Hey!" Fratello recalled something. "Remember them signs I made on pop's bags? 'Bananas 10 cents a lb.'? 'Apples 3 for 5 cents'? Stuck up on sticks? Real fancy. An they were good, too! Remember? Sure, I usta make them!"

"Sure I remember them. And they were good! I bet you didn't forget how to handle a brush, either. . . ."

"Nah, ya never forget that. I bet I can do as good as any guy ya got in a class!"

I got paper, brush, and paint. Fratello waived ruler and pencil. "Whaddaya think, I can't work without them?" He pretended indignation, but he was enjoying the idea of showing everyone up. The years had shaken Fratello's confidence and Iodine's snide comments did not help. But a sign emerged:

Bananas
10¢ lb.

"Man, you're livin inna past! Where the hell ya gonna get bananas fa a dime a pound nowadays?" Iodine wanted to know.

"Who gives a damn about the price? Looka the letterin. Not bad . . . ?"

I told Fratello the lettering was good. I went a step further, I told Iodine I didn't think he could do one tenth as well. More paper. More brushes. More paint. Fratello and Iodine spent the rest of the day vying with each other, trying to make a better "Bananas 10¢ lb." sign. The next morning was the same. "Bananas 10¢ lb." was done in all colors and all sizes, but by noon the high peak of enthusiasm for "Bananas 10¢ lb." had passed.

I suggested other fruits and vegetables and for a while interest

perked up. For a short while. Even needling failed to get a rise out of either of them. All I wanted was to keep Fratello and Iodine busy and in that way keep them out of trouble. When I brought fresh paper to their desks they shook their heads. I went back to talking with them, searching for a way to renew interest in sign painting.

Fratello spoke for himself. "Look. I'm doin thirty years an I owe the State twelve. Forty-two years. Givin myself the best of it with every day of good time — which I won't get — it's still twenty-eight years. Right? In twenty-eight years I could become one hell of a sign painter and if I get out maybe earn myself fifty or sixty bucks a week. Well, fifty, or sixty bucks a week ain't ever goin to add up to twenty-eight years in this rathole! So forget about it."

Iodine spoke for himself. "Forget about it!"

I continued to spend much time with the two reluctant pupils — talking, lying, boasting. I refused to forget about it. I refused to forget that they both had a good time while playing with colors and fashioning letters.

We talked mostly about stealing and rackets and thieves and racketeers. Iodine pointed out how the smart money was going. "Organization. That's the thing. Ya organize a mob an ya work with the law. The suckers can't help themselves that way. They gotta pony up or else. It's like bein in business. Looka the heist mobs — I mean the ones makin money, not the punks 'ust startin out — all organized; an the bootleggers an rumrunners — each one's got his own territory an no foolin aroun. Even the guys with the junk, ya can see how they're coverin the country — 'East coast is mine down ta Atlantic City, Florida an the South is yours, West coast is his,' an so on. Organization. That's the thing. Ya gotta do it legit nowadays."

Fratello and I agreed that organization was the only way. Fratello expanded on Iodine's theme. "Sure. That's right. Lookit them guys up in Connecticut. All businessmen. Gas station owner, grocery store owner, hardware store owner, an I forget the other two." He held up five fingers. "Alla then: married, got kids, go ta church an town meetins. Respectable. Two or three times a year they meet, tell their wives they're goin on a vacation, load the cars up with heaters, an knock off a bank out inna Midwest or down

South somewhere. That's what I call smart. No chances. No guesswork. Everything figured to a T. An what does it? Organization. That's the answer. Why, even the two-bit hoods are organizin little things like back-yard crap games, corner bookies, an two-buck hustlers. My ol man told me they're even tryin ta organize the pushcarts. . . ."

A smart guy can organize anything and make a buck out of it. Shoeshine boys, newspaper peddlers, garbage collectors, stevedores, window washers, anything . . . anyone.

I spoke to Fratello. "Suppose you were called out for a visit. Right now. Suppose when you got out to the visiting room a big, good-looking dame came over and introduced herself. Polly Adler. She heard about you and came all the way up to Dannemora to see you. She's got a proposition. . . . Not what you think — she's got an angle for her business and she wants you to work on it. She wants to organize all the cat joints in the city. How would you go about doing it?"

The idea tickled Fratello and Iodine. They offered spontaneous suggestions. Curious, startling, obscene. They elaborated, modified, rejected, accepted, extended, and projected their ideas into fantastic plans for organizing a Prostitutes' International Guild, to be hereafter referred to as the PIG's Union.

"Hey! That's a real ideal!" Iodine was serious. "Start out in a small way. Right in my own territory inna Village. Organize them by blocks; then the lower West Side an the upper West Side; then the East Side an Harlem. Spread out soon's the thing gets under way: Brooklyn, Bronx, Queens, even Staten Island an Jersey City. . . ." He was carried away by the idea, the possibilities. "Ya won't be able ta stop yaself! The East coast; the West coast; all the United States; Mexico; Canada . . . Jesus!"

Fantasy evolving into reality. The idea was practical. It could be fashioned into a flesh-peddling organization on a world-wide scale.

Fratello was already working out the details. "Ya take Chineese gash, bring it over here; ya take our own gash, send it over there. France to Brazil, Egypt ta Sweden. Shift them aroun. Give the johns variety an charge them double. They'll eat it up an the take'll be that much bigger. . . ."

I brought the two back to Dannemora. "Sounds great. But right

now our problem is: How? Remember, Polly offered you a proposition and you're going to take her on. How are you going to work the thing out? There's only one way. Advertising!"

Fratello and Iodine nodded. Advertising was the sensible, logical way to build business. Even a Hoosier would know that.

"How do you advertise? You plan a campaign — let's say for a six-month period. You cover a given area and you use all the advertising media available to bang away at the suckers in that area. Radio, magazines, newspapers, billboards, and posters. Do you agree?"

They agreed. This was more than a game to Fratello and Iodine. This was a dry run for a plan that was crystallizing for both of them. They agreed. Seriously.

"We start in a small way. We start in the Village, in Iodine's territory."

I outlined a plan for covering the Village with posters advertising Polly's Pleasure Palace. Several of the other pupils offered their views on how the campaign should be carried out. We were swamped with ideas for placing the proposed posters in store windows, on lampposts, in the side windows of automobiles and police cars — the boys were teeming with dynamic ideas. Eventually we got down to cases. What kind of poster, what size, what color would be most likely to attract the most customers? That was the idea — most customers.

Fratello and Iodine were eager to start working on the posters. What had started out as whimsey had developed into a paying proposition for the two. They worked intently, wholly absorbed in the job — and by the time the officer in charge of the school company announced the noon break they had completed one poster each:

POLLY'S PLEASURE PALACE
25—Beautiful, Exotic, Adaptable—25
GIRLS!!

Reasonable Rates Open 4 P.M. to 4 A.M.

Music Refreshments

Police Protection

HURRY HURRY HURRY!!!

The competitive spirit asserted itself. That afternoon while Fratello was doing another, improved poster for Polly's Pleasure Palace, Iodine sneakily attempted to lure the customers into

HILDA'S HEAVEN

50—Gorgeous Girlies—50

(members of the PIG's Union)

Drinking Dining Dancing

Delights to satisfy the most Depraved

Open TWENTY-FOUR HOURS a day!

Fratello reacted in a decisive, businesslike manner. He imported ONE HUNDRED LUSCIOUS BEAUTIES into Polly's. He ascribed to each a peerless artistry for dispensing uncommon joy. Fees were cut. Harried by the pressures of competition, Iodine immediately made another poster announcing HILDA'S GIFT PREMIUM — consisting of Twelve Tastefully Framed 8" x 10" Glossy Print Photos of HILDA'S HEAVENLY HOURIS in Candid, Erotic Poses.

The posters were improving. Neither Fratello nor Iodine attached any immediate, utilitarian value to what he was doing. The result was that their lettering was fairly good, their color schemes were daring. The price war continued without cessation and by the middle of the following morning the boys had put themselves out of business as an inevitable consequence of giving their product, with increasingly expensive premiums, away — free.

I hung the posters in a conspicuous place in the classroom. They were immensely popular and effective — Polly and Hilda would have cleaned up had they been operating in Dannemora. Criticism was lush, ribald, and offered in generous quantities. Even the guards and civilian teachers got a kick out of the display and the tension surrounding Fratello and Iodine lessened. They could laugh and take a ribbing. They were not such bad guys. In fact, they were almost human.

The POLLY-HILDA posters stimulated Fratello and Iodine enough for them to want to make other posters after the novelty of advertising bordellos had worn off. They began to develop an interest in the craft of making letters, in layout and design, and in color arrangements. After a few weeks Iodine thought that pictures

would help and I encouraged him and Fratello to include simple, single-dimension drawings in their posters. Their lettering and conception of poster design improved with each poster they made. They made many posters. A rivalry between the two on one hand, and between the two and the rest of the class on the other hand, proved incentive enough to raise the level of work for every pupil.

The officer in charge of the school company began to relax. His vigil at the classroom window stopped. Fratello and Iodine had accepted class routine and, what was more important, they were thriving on it. Their lettering and ability to design posters were professional in caliber and execution.

That autumn the Department of Education invited — through the Department of Correction — all pupils attending vocational classes in State institutions to participate in an arts and crafts exhibition in Albany. Dannemora, represented by my class, sent a large carton of posters, half of which had been done by Fratello and Iodine. No one in Dannemora was overly excited about the exhibit. The opinion was that the Department of Education and the Department of Correction had to prove to the taxpayers that they were doing something and the exhibit was a conspiracy between the two departments in their efforts to hoodwink John Q. Public.

The completely unexpected surprise was that Fratello and Iodine received top awards for their posters. When the Prof told us about the awards we refused to believe him. He was obliged to produce a letter sent him by the Department of Correction, announcing the awards and praising the school for having carried off the honors. The accuracy of the letter's context was fully accepted the following day when the Albany *Knickerbocker News* carried a short column reporting the exhibit and naming the prisons in which award winners were confined.

Fratello and Iodine were given fairly good jobs. Suspicion and constant surveillance eased off and in time they were regarded as having no greater potential for violence and troublemaking than any other con. They became numbers who might explode at any moment but the percentages against their exploding had shifted in favor of the prison's officials.

The story of Fratello and Iodine had a not unhappy ending. Their energy for hate and violence was channeled into a less de-

structive reservoir by simply diverting and maintaining their interest, into a constructive direction — in their case, sign painting. The story of Fratello and Iodine is not an example of successful or partially successful rehabilitation. Fratello is still in Danne-mora dreaming of an agonizing revenge; Iodine is dead as a result of taking an injudicious mixture of narcotics shortly after his release from prison.

The story of Fratello and Iodine is the story of a small failure and a great failure. The small failure was mine. When I first began to scheme of a way to arouse at least the semblance of interest in sign painting in the two men, I was motivated by selfishness and fear. My solitary concern was to avoid trouble in the classroom and, specifically, to avoid trouble myself. I cajoled, bootlicked, and flattered my way into Fratello's and Iodine's confidence and then I reasoned with them. I discovered that they were susceptible to reason, that they were tractable to suggestion. Once I had their confidence, I discovered I could steam them up or cool them off. I cooled them off but I lacked the knowledge, the understanding, the ability to do a thorough job of it and in that I failed them. The greater failure was the prison Administration's inability or reluctance to recognize the benefits that could be gathered from a simple, practical rehabilitation program and to pass such recognition on to those who could do something about it—the penologists, the legislators, the social workers. A man trained in the work of criminal rehabilitation would accomplish infinitely more in an infinitely shorter time than all the mothers' tears, all the priests' sermons, and all the guards' clubs combined, since the first man was locked in the first prison.

The story of Fratello and Iodine is the story of several dozen other tough guys, agitators, shiv men, troublemakers, who were put into my class steaming with resentment of the Law, of rules and regulations, and of convicts who were not in trouble, like themselves. They, too, were cooled off to a greater or lesser degree. They, too, learned to live with two thousand other men, each one of whom boiled in his own particular brand of hatred, of rage, of anger. They left my class and they left Dannemora and some of them left this life. None of them had more than a glimmer of understanding of the social order and their relation to it. All of them were, potentially, good citizens.

TWENTY-SEVEN

DANNEMORA WAS ALWAYS CHANGING. THE PHYSICAL PERSONALITY of the prison as well as the human personalities who inhabited it were in a constant condition of flux. To meet the demands of a punitive society, reinforced concrete and steel were lavishly distributed about the State and transformed into high walls and modern cell blocks designed to meet the comforts of another generation of criminals. Overpopulation in the old prisons forced the issue and the legislators responded handsomely in terms of funds, reports, and planning commissions. Rebuilding obsolete state institutions began with P.W.A. assistance in the early 1930s. It continues, erratically and under State supervision, to the present day—proof of the shortsightedness of the planning commission which had loftily declared at the very beginning of their function that the per capita increase in crime in New York State could not exceed a figure which the commission itself had carelessly established.

Prison officials who were acutely conscious of immediate and future needs fought a bitter campaign for a realistic program of expansion which anticipated a doubling and trebling of the State's prison population. They lost out to the advocates of the healthy-environment prison, who argued syllogistically: if a healthy environment produces good citizens, and prison offers a healthy environment, it follows that prison will produce good citizens. Furthermore, good citizens are never sent to prison and a day was envisioned when prisons would be empty except for wardens, guards, and civilian workers, praying desperately for at least a single honest-to-goodness criminal who would justify their reason for existence.

The legislators who had enthusiastically endorsed the criminal-rehabilitation-via-healthy-prison-environment program neatly scuttled the whole business by voting into law, just as enthusiastically, bills designed to increase, two- and threefold, sentences for all categories of felonies. They reasoned that it would take time to produce a good citizen — even in a healthy environment. To emphasize their ignorance of penological imperatives, the good-willed solons denied a pay increase to prison guards and workers, which had the effect of discouraging anyone who might be inclined or dedicated to human reclamation. It goes without saying that the prison budget was sliced to the very tail — a condition which obliged prison authorities to operate with a stark minimum of help.

The contradictions inherent in such an unorganized, multilevel approach to the prison and prisoner problem, led irresistibly to confusion, inefficiency, and demoralization. Prison management — from the commissioner of correction down to the newest guard — was under tremendous pressure for which there was no ease and which had built up as a result of the inevitable overpopulation coupled with a dangerous lack of adequate help. Prison populations were restive, irascible, rebellious. Excessive prison sentences were felt in the Administration Buildings of every prison in New York State long before they became an acute problem in the Capitol and in every home in the Empire State. The issue of feeding and clothing more men than the budget allowed, of housing more men than space permitted, of guarding more men than the prison staff could handle, was eventually, and only partially, solved by the rejection of the new, psychological approach to crime and the criminal, and a reversion to the good old club psychology which had proved so effective in the past.

There are few things as articulate as a club.

When his freedom, well-being, or safety is threatened, a convict quickly learns to think in simple, direct, practical patterns. When the club menaces, he knows that argument or discussion is out of bounds. He feels that a menace, to be effectively eliminated, must be countered with a greater menace. To a con, the answer is plain — the only answer possible — a shiv.

In underworld lingo a shiv is a stiletto, dagger, or knife. In prison parlance a shiv is a piece of metal patiently rubbed for long watchful hours against a stone or other abrasive until one edge

assumes the keenness of a razor blade and one end is worn to a needle point. Though it is rarely used as such, a shiv can be a defensive weapon. Generally it is used for sudden, lethal attack. Clubs and shivs create perilous situations. A con gets his head fractured by a club. In a dark corner a screw is found dead — a shiv stuck into some particularly vulnerable part of his anatomy. More heads are fractured by clubs. More men are shivved. The view, as they say, becomes dim.

Men with hopelessly long sentences tend to brood about injustice. When fear of additional, corporal punishment is superimposed, it becomes a catalyst provoking a positive reaction. Brooding is accelerated into grumbling and voluble complaining, which is accelerated into passive resistance in the form of refusal to work and, in extreme cases, refusal to eat, which is accelerated into isolated acts of violence, which is accelerated into concerted acts of violence.

Then you have a bloody, furious riot.

Do not consider a riot in terms of pain, suffering, bloodshed. Do not consider a riot in terms of moral torment or physical anguish. Consider a riot in terms of your pocketbook: the cost of equipment destroyed; the cost of bedding, food, supplies, and buildings put to flames; the cost of using local police, State Police, and the National Guard; the cost of maintaining a protracted siege; the cost of doctors, nurses, medicines, and special equipment for healing, sewing, patching wounds; the cost of death benefits to guards' and policemen's widows; the cost of burying convicts who failed to survive the riot.

These are the only things to be considered. These are the only things that are considered before a sluggish legislator will do anything about correcting a situation which could have been prevented in the first place.

These are the things that scrape the bottom of your pocket-book. You know something must be done so you shell out — again without question. New buildings, new equipment, new guards for new convicts. New cell blocks in Dannemora were added to by newer cell blocks. Old buildings were converted into rubble which disappeared in the endless line of wreckers' trucks grinding in and out of the front gate. Lawns were laid out over the scarred areas where the old blocks had done business for one and a half cen-

turies. Stony dirt paths were transformed into smooth slate walks. Stone gave way to concrete, iron to steel. Slop buckets were discarded with the building rubble.

We were given roomy, sunny cells. We were given toilets and washbasins with running water. We were given clean, airy buildings that were functional and good to look at. Buildings that were scientifically designed and laid out to obtain the maximum of clean mountain air and pure sunshine for their inhabitants. Living in the new Dannemora was like living in a new housing project. Perhaps that should be said the other way around. In any event, there we were with nice new cells, nice new buildings, nice new guards.

But in spite of all predictions to the contrary, we were not happy. There were men who freely admitted that life in Dannemora was superior to life at home. Yet they were unhappy. They seemed to prefer the uncertainties and vicissitudes of freedom to the comforts and security of prison.

We beefed constantly and loudly about the long sentences being handed out by the courts. We beefed to each other, we beefed to our families, we beefed to lawyers, judges, district attorneys, councilmen, senators, governor, screws, warden, priest — anyone who would listen. We had a legitimate beef.

Think of the sizable chunk of the citizenry of the United States of America crammed into prisons, scattered throughout the forty-eight states, Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico. Tens of thousands of sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, sweethearts, friends, neighbors, acquaintances, fellow humans — that's a lot of people. All of these people are sentenced to prison for varying lengths of time which, statistically, average ten years. One decade.

Think of these tens of thousands as a whole, not as a particular individual who might have committed a particularly horrifying crime. Think of the tens of thousands of decades being wasted behind bars and think of yourself as the possible dupe of circumstance sentenced to spend at least ten years of your life confined in steel and concrete. Would it take at least ten years for you to see the error of your ways? While you think of this, keep in mind that qualified penological thought has rejected the conception of prison as a punitive measure against the social offender. Prison is no more a limbo to which one is consigned to do penance. Prison

is a place for remolding personality, for recasting social values, for re-creating character. Prison is a place for healing, a place for saving, a place for building. Would it take ten years for you to be saved, to be resocialized, rehabilitated? If so, why ten years? Why not twenty years? One hundred years? A thousand years? Does the doctor set an arbitrary time limit for the curing of a disease?

Since an anti-social act is regarded as a psychical aberration, is it not logical that the perpetrator of such an act should be put in the care of a trained, competent, knowledgeable specialist in the field of rehabilitation?

Is the judge such a specialist?

Is the district attorney such a specialist?

Is the warden of a prison such a specialist?

Or the prison guard?

There are those who do not believe that the criminal is the product of his environment. These believe that criminality is inherent, congenital, and can be traced directly to the father's gonads. If that is true, then the individual committing a criminal act cannot be held responsible for his father's reproductive shortcomings. Then there are those who are indifferent as to the ultimate reason why an individual commits a crime. A criminal is a criminal and should be punished for any criminal act at which he might be caught. This is the simple, direct method of ridding oneself of the problem.

Catch a thief.

Punish a thief.

Wash your hands of the whole affair.

Catch him again.

Punish him again.

Wash your hands of the whole affair.

Over and over again. Multiplied by tens of thousands, which adds up to an incalculable amount of crimes being constantly committed without hope of a solution — ever.

Time is the most important element in every man's life and the man in prison is conscious of it twenty-four hours a day. For him, time becomes life itself. He contemplates time in a different perspective. Any man about to be sentenced to prison for having committed any kind of crime would, if he had the choice, without hesitation prefer a short tough bit to a long easy bit. Even if he were

a second or third or fourth offender and had already done the short tough bits.

The old-timers still talk about the silent system under which speech was prohibited to the convict under penalty of immediate and drastic punishment. The old-timers still talk about the lock step: the slightest break in the rhythm was quickly corrected with a club. They still talk about "task," which meant producing a maximum daily quota of work in the prison shops — or else. They still talk about the hole and bread and water and lumps. They still talk about the reign of terror imposed upon them from the moment they entered prison until the moment they left it. Most of all they talk about the short sentences they served. Those were the days when a three-year sentence was thought inhuman. Those were the days of short tough sentences.

No attempts at rehabilitation. No attempts at resocialization. Punishment was the standard and punishment did nothing for the felon except to make him warier, more cunning, and more inclined to violence. Punishment was not the answer to the financial and moral problems generated by the increasing number of prisons and prisoners. Punishment, whether it is corporal, psychological, or moral, whether it is fitted into the framework of a short sentence or a long sentence, is not the answer. Not for the con or for his respectable brother.

Punishment fitted into the guise of paternal benevolence is not the answer either. In fact punishment is no answer at all.

TWENTY-EIGHT

MUCH OF THE CONVERSATION IN DANNEMORA WAS ABOUT NARCOTICS. In the cell blocks, in the shops, in the mess hall, barber-shop, bathroom, on the baseball diamond, handball courts, over plates of spaghetti, cups of coffee, and cigarettes talk about dope would invariably be wedged in somewhere between current events and women. One reason for so much interest in the topic was that about one third of the prison population was composed of addicts and peddlers.

In New York State all known addicts, peddlers, and users of drugs were sent to Dannemora on the theory that, the greater the distance between point of demand and point of supply, the more secure the control over the consumers. The most distant point from all known sources of supply was Dannemora. Another theory was that by isolating addicts and peddlers in one prison the felons in all the other prisons in the State would be protected against contamination.

Treatment of addicts in Dannemora, though harsh and unscientific, was astonishingly effective. The method required no trained personnel or special equipment. An addict, upon arriving in Dannemora, was given a number, a cell, and a talk on rules and regulations. He was sent to his cell in the reception company, called out for routine examinations by physician, psychiatrist, and minister. He was photographed, weighed, measured, and fingerprinted. If at any time during the reception period he complained of cramps or sweating or nausea, he was sent to the pharmacy where a dose of castor oil was administered orally. He was then excused from

further activities for the day, locked in his cell, and not disturbed until the next morning.

He had to sweat it out. That day and the next day and the next until he was able to pick up prison routine where he had left off. By the time his reception period in the prison had ended he was considered cured. No doctors or attendants. No tapering-off periods and fancy medicines. No pampering with diet or psyche before the record read: Cured (doubtful). In Dannemora there was no alternative but to get cured. To kick the habit. There was not even the choice of dying — that was against rules and regulations.

The idea that a junky would sell his mother for a few grams of dope has taken unyielding root in the criminal mind. The fear of disloyalty is accentuated by the knowledge that addiction to drugs is a proven indication of moral weakness. That may be so, but the police of any community in the United States will agree that, proportionately, there are no more stool pigeons of the addict breed than there are of the non-addict variety. Moral weakness need not necessarily manifest itself in a predilection for cocaine, opium, morphine, or heroin. In Dannemora some of the roughest, rightest guys were junkies.

I knew many junkies in Dannemora. We broke bread together, exchanged reminiscences, and spoke freely of our hopes and fears. Junkies are no different from alcoholics, religious zealots, political fanatics, domino enthusiasts, or assassins. There are junkies who are lovable, there are junkies who are abominations, and there are junkies who are in between — just as in any other group.

Scratch was one of my junky friends. He was a barber with a barber's conversation complex. He cut my hair once every week — contrary to rules and regulations — and while performing the tonsorial service he gave impromptu talks on modern jazz and the theater. He professed to be a friend of Mezz Mezzrow, "an off-beat stud that's real cool and frantic." His normal speech was embellished with enough understandable words to make sense. He was a zoot-suiter and, on the outside, combination night club entertainer and single-o fancy man: "One chick on the turf at a time. I cerebrate, man! That overtime pimp kick ain't nowhere."

Scratch was loyal, warmhearted, and free of the least taint of resentment against anyone. "Man, me and the man with the tin star see it the same way. I see it his way and he sees it mine and

it totals eye to eye. He's got to hang me up for using stuff and he understands I got to dummy up about all the studs I know on the kick. I got nothing but milk in my veins — and maybe a dram of H left over from the last bang."

Scratch's hangout was on the court adjoining mine. We became close friends and spent many hours together. I had friends working in the hospital and, thinking of Scratch, I arranged to have some morphine sneaked out of the clinic. Scratch had been in Dannemora about five years at the time and I thought that a bang of morphine would be the least expected and most wonderful gesture of friendship I could make. The morphine, in two capsules, was delivered to my cell and the next day I gave it to Scratch.

"What's this, man?" he wanted to know.

I explained that I had connected for some M. "Here it is and go have yourself a ball."

Scratch juggled the capsules in his hand. He smiled. "Man, you're a real Hatter. Don't you dig that I ain't had no star dust all the years I'm buried and I don't want any now? This stuff is homicide, man!" He dropped the capsules and methodically ground them into the earth with his heel.

For a guy who was forever talking about dope in all its forms and the multitude of delights it offered, that was a strange thing to do. I reasoned that Scratch must be really cured.

Scratch served twelve years in Dannemora and in all that time he was what is popularly referred to as a model prisoner. That is, he was never caught breaking or disobeying prison rules and regulations. He was always neat in dress, respectful to officers and inmates. He did the job to which he was assigned without complaining or stalling. After ten years he met the Parole Board and was denied freedom for another eighteen months. He met the Parole Board a second time and again his plea for freedom was rejected — this time for an additional six months. No one could understand it. What the hell did the Parole Board want from a guy? Blood?

His third meeting with the Parole Board was a thorough success. Anticipating a repetition of the previous meetings, Scratch had not bothered about getting a job or home — absolute essentials before parole could be considered. But the Parole Board released Scratch out of necessity. Had Scratch been held up much longer, his maxi-

mum sentence would have been served and he would have to be released — without supervision.

The day before Scratch was to walk out of Dannemora a free man, his court and my court pooled resources to throw a farewell party for him. We had spaghetti, sausages and green peppers, commissary cake, and coffee. It was a great party. After it was over a con from another court came up to say good-by. He handed Scratch a slip of paper and told him to memorize the name and address. "Just tell him I sent you an everything'll be okay."

Scratch was jubilant. "Sure thing, man. I'll tell him, I'll tell him. . . ." Scratch was all set. He had just connected. "Tomorrow night, I'm taking all the loot they give me here and I'm seeing this stud!" He waved the slip he had just received. "Man, am I going to have a ball. I'm going to get all the H I can and pop till the stars come down to talk!"

Twelve years without a smell of it. Destroying it when it was given to him. Then, the first night he is free, going right back to it. Funny.

No different from the man who goes back to his wife after she had him sent to prison.

The first official anti-marijuana drive in Dannemora got under way in the middle thirties. Blown-up drawings and photos of the weed were posted in the guardroom. Pamphlets purporting to describe the damaging effects of marijuana upon the human nervous and moral systems were handed out to prison personnel with injunctions to read carefully. Guards were ordered to attend lectures at which they were taught how to identify the American cousin of *Cannabis indica*, by sight, touch, taste, smell, and sound.

One guard warned the men in his company, "They tell me marijuana looks like a weed, it feels like a weed, it tastes like a weed, it smells like a weed, and I can't tell a weed from brussels sprout. But don't let me hear any popping near any of you guys!"

He was referring to the popular Speedy Dry & Cure Method for Marijuana, then in use in the prison. The raw, fresh leaves of marijuana, gage, mota, gonga, griffo, tea, weed, or yen pop — depending upon the vagaries of local idiom — are packed loosely in a small sized tobacco tin. The cover is closed and the tin placed upon an exposed portion of bedspring. Heat, generated by a twist of newspaper, candle, or other inflammable substance, is applied to the

tin for about five minutes. The marijuana is then spread on newspaper and permitted to cool for about ten to fifteen minutes, after which it is repacked in the tobacco can and again subjected to heat, this time with the can cover open. When the leaves are picked, it is almost impossible to avoid picking some of the seed pods, which to the viper are a headache — literally. It is these pods, drying and expanding from the applied heat, that burst with a slight popping noise.

The second cooking takes approximately thirty minutes. The tea is allowed to cool once more. By this time the leaves are thoroughly dry and crisp. They are crushed into flakes between the palms of the hands, rolled into thin reefers, and are ready for smoking.

Marijuana flourished in Dannemora. No one ever analyzed the chemical composition of the soil in the recreation yard, but it certainly must have contained an abundance of the particular nourishment necessary to the speedy and lush growth of loco weed. There was hardly a spot in the yard — except the infield of the baseball diamond — where a man could not pick himself a few leaves of gage within six feet of where he happened to be standing or sitting.

An addict is not an addict. An addict is a viper, a snake, a goof, a T-man. In Dannemora we had mostly vipers, with the exception of a small, exclusive, super-hep group in which "snake" was the label of distinction. And no one ever smokes marijuana. At least no one in the know. A reefer or muggle is blasted banged, and blown — never smoked.

The legitimate junkies looked down on the vipers. Offering marijuana to a junky is like slipping a three-dollar bill to a counterfeiter. Junkies fulminated vigorously against the "stinkin weed. Why, it's even bad for hosses. Ya can't compare it to C or M or H. . . ."

They argued that marijuana was overpublicized as a menace to mind and body; that it is not a drug. The alleged exhilaration which the weed is supposed to produce is less than that obtained from caffeine or nicotine, they asserted. To attribute possible addiction to the weed is nonsense. Vipers and snakes conceded that addiction is impossible, citing as proof their own experiences of five or ten or twenty or thirty years of blasting without developing an obsessive craving for it.

It was further said that blasting weed was a social amenity akin to, and less noxious than, tobacco smoking. "Blasting a reefer strictly on the lonesome ain't nowhere" was how the marijuana smoker felt about it. "You gotta have a viper or two along — even if they're not with you."

Most marijuana smoking in Dannemora was done in the evening, in the security of the cell. But it was not done on the lonesome. Friends arranged parties before the final lockup for the day. A specific hour for lighting up would be agreed upon.

"Tell you what. Let's start blasting right after the eight o'clock count. The Duke'll be on the air and we'll have some fine jive to go along with us. Dig?"

"I dig it, man! Eight bells it is! Cue me on the kick."

"How's about the South Seas? Swayin palms, moonlight on the water, an a load of gorgeous chicks?"

"Solid, man! Solid!"

Immediately after the guard made his count at eight the two vipers, or three or five or more, who were having the party would signal to each other from their cells that it was time to light up.

Separated from each other, by steel or stone walls, they were not alone. Most of the kick in blasting gage is a suggested state of mind brought about by the cue on which all the smokers agree. The South Seas, the palm trees, and the girls are upon several levels. The smoker imagines himself the hero of the fantasy, while vicariously enjoying the further imagined individual and collective experiences of the viper friends on the same cue.

The drive to eliminate marijuana in Dannemora was begun, carried out, and concluded with great energy and thoroughness by every guard assigned to the task. Cells, lockers, shops, and inmates were searched after a frisk was announced. Then the identical cells, lockers, shops, and inmates were searched in an extended series of surprise frisks. After two weeks of searching the tactic produced exactly nothing.

However, the recreation yard produced results. All the larger marijuana farms were dug up and the weed burned.

The snakes and the vipers were not dismayed. There was enough fertile gage seed scattered in the very cells, lockers, and shops that had undergone so many frisks to keep them happy for a long, long time to come.

A special two-man guard post was erected at a strategic point in the center of the yard, overlooking the courts and with an excellent view of the baseball field. As a preventive measure against marijuana growing, the post did not pay off. As a point of vantage for baseball games it was perfect. The guards assigned to that post could not understand why so many cons hung around it during their recreation periods. In fact some of the guards were forced to revise long-held opinions about cons. A man who offers you a cup of coffee or a ham sandwich or a plate of spaghetti cannot be too bad. The coffee was always good and the spaghetti better than the wife or the Wop joint in Plattsburg was able to concoct — and chewing the fat with the boys helped pass the hours.

Cons enjoyed the novel relationship that developed between themselves and the screws. They enjoyed it with a peculiar relish while the screws were gabbing or slopping up coffee or spaghetti. They enjoyed it especially while they harvested the daily supply of marijuana growing so profusely around the guard post.

Marijuana was a minor problem in Dannemora. What produced violent headaches in the front office was the occasional discovery of morphine, heroin, or cocaine during a routine frisk of cell, shop, or inmate. The presence of drugs in a prison immediately impugns the honesty of prison personnel.

Prison officials know that drugs can be smuggled in to inmates in numberless ways — in food packages, during visits, in the mails — through every known contact the prisoner maintains with the outside world. Prison officials know, too, that smuggling contraband usually involves a guard or civilian worker being paid to insure success for the operation.

When a No. 2 size tomato can packed with enough unadulterated morphine to stock Bellevue Hospital for a month was found during a frisk of the West Hall, the front office clamped down with a vengeance. That much morphine indicated official connivance. That much unadulterated morphine further indicated a big-money involvement. An immediate investigation was ordered. The man in whose cell the stuff was found was a penny-ante hoodlum. He denied knowledge or possession of the tomato can and its contents and continued his denials even when subjected to extreme pressure. Every con in his company, every con in the shop in which he worked, every con on his court, every con known to be remotely

friendly with him, was questioned in the hope of getting a lead on the morphine. Without result. He was consigned to the isolation building and that was the last seen of him in Dannemora.

The first break for the front office arrived when the warden received a letter in which the writer complained she had been receiving threatening notes from her one time spouse, presently serving a life sentence in Dannemora. Since all incoming and outgoing mail in the prison is censored, the front office had to conclude that the threatening notes were kited out — smuggled out of prison and mailed by a corrupt employee. The front office wanted to catch that employee.

A round-the-clock watch was placed on the writer of the threatening notes and before long it was noted that he was more than usually friendly with a guard in the West Hall. The guard was watched closely and the first report on him included the observation that he regularly had coffee with Blackie, a gallery man in the West Hall. It was also noted that once a week the guard under suspicion was seen tossing a carton of cigarettes into Blackie's cell — a violation of rules which was generally winked at by the front office.

The suspect guard was placed under surveillance. His activities outside the prison aroused instant interest. It was pointed out by the watchers that he made daily trips to the Plattsburg post office where he had a delivery box under a name other than the one by which he was known. In addition he received deliveries almost every day — boxes and packages of various sizes, shapes, and colors.

At this point the county prosecutor was called in and the front office's suspicions were turned over to him. They had the guard — cold. On complaint of the warden of Clinton Prison, the guard was arrested on suspicion of smuggling contraband to prison inmates in violation of department rules and the Criminal Code, which sounds impressively awesome but is in reality a technical device for holding a person for further investigation and a possible departmental trial. The arrest occurred outside the Plattsburg post office where the guard had picked up several packages.

The packages were taken over by the prosecutor's office and upon examination were found to contain silk stockings, expensive evening gowns, and equally expensive ladies' underthings. In his

statement to the prosecutor, made freely and without coercion, the guard admitted that he had foolishly mailed letters for convicts and even brought contraband — like electric stove wire — in for some especially decent prisoner. Certainly it was not unknown that these things happened regularly? Practically every guard in the prison had at one time or another done the same!

The ladies' wear? Presents for the missus. True, they were expensive, more expensive, really, than the budget could stand, but you know how unreasonable women can get? Even in a faraway place like Dannemora they want to be glamorous.

The guard was suspended pending a departmental trial and the front office and prosecutor felt satisfied that the affair was as simple as it had turned out. But their timing was off.

About a week after his arrest the suspended guard, frightened and conscience-stricken, obtained an interview with the warden during which he elaborated upon his original statement. Yes, he had brought letters into and out of the prison and he had brought electric stove wire in to various cons but he had forgotten to mention to the prosecutor that he had also brought packages, which he never inspected, to Blackie. He imagined that they contained cigarettes. As a matter of fact he was pretty certain of it — he had seen a Chesterfield carton once when the wrapping tore. He just wanted to get everything clear. And another thing — the stockings and gowns and stuff. They were presents for the missus all right. The only thing was he didn't buy them. They were presents from a friend of Blackie's who was a buyer for all the big stores in New York City. Yes. He had written to this friend. Yes. He had sent kites to him. Yes. The packages for Blackie were from this friend.

Yes indeed.

The county prosecutor was notified of the new development. The county prosecutor notified the New York police, forwarding the name and address, to which the New York City police hurried only to find an empty office, vacated two days before, according to the building superintendent. It was a stalemate at that end.

In Plattsburg the suspended guard indulged in a little more unsolicited elaborating for the prosecutor. He had received a package for Blackie the day after his arrest. Yes. He thought it was somewhere around the house. He had not opened it.

The package was on the kitchen table when the prosecutor arrived. Unwrapped, it was found to contain one carton of Chesterfield cigarettes. The carton was emptied and the packs opened. The fourth pack was full of morphine. It had been opened, its legitimate contents removed, packed with the drug, and resealed so cleverly that only the most minute examination could discover any tampering. The guard was permitted to resign in consideration for his having testified for the prosecution. Blackie received seven years for possession of narcotics.

The State missed an opportunity for getting its hands on the leaders of an international syndicate dealing in the illegal transportation and sale of narcotics. And the cons in Dannemora had a great belly laugh when news seeped into the prison that the "presents for the missus" had been positively identified as stolen property. Hot stuff!

In prison, the price of dope is approximately double the price on the outside. In a short time the enterprising dealer can make a living for himself and his family, with enough left over to retire. Just as in any business, there are hazards — but that's the way it is. In the meantime, money rolls in. All payments are made outside the prison. The user's friend or relative is directed — generally during a visit — to meet the dealer's friend or relative. The meeting takes place and cash crosses palm. Dealer and user are notified and the connection is established.

The user's chief concern is to connect with a dealer. The dealer's chief concern is to connect with someone who will bring the stuff in for him.

The dealer's problem always resolves itself into: which guard?

Guards who risk their jobs and freedom by becoming junk connections are rare — no matter how tempting the money might be. But guards, like convicts and respectable citizens, being people, do go for the greenback lure.

Otherwise there would not be a narcotics business.

TWENTY-NINE

EVERY MORNING THE INMATES OF DANNEMORA HAD TO BE AWAKE, washed, and dressed before the cell gates opened. Beds had to be made according to prescribed rules, and cells swept. Before opening the gates, company guards made their first count of the day. The cons were supposed to stand at attention in front of their cells while the count was on. None ever did and no guard ever expected them to. After the count the gallery brakes were released and the gates ground open, starting the noise of frenzied sweeping, shouted greetings, and resumed conversations that had been cut off the evening before. Everyone did something noisy and with a lavish expenditure of energy. Thermos bottles and pails had to be filled with hot water, newspapers, books, and magazines had to be passed, occasional quarrels had to be settled before breakfast, last-second shaves completed, and bets settled.

Everyone did something except the guy in the cell on my left, a new fish who had moved in at lockup time the day before. I had no idea who he was or what he looked like.

His first morning in the school company, he stood just outside his cell, not shy or reserved, but withdrawn from the racket raging on the gallery.

He hadn't yet been issued a broom and his cell was unswept. I caught his eye.

"Use my broom and get your cell cleaned out. The hall screw is rough on dirty cells."

He went through the motions of sweeping his cell and, when he had finished, returned the broom with a noncommittal "Thanks."

When the company lined up for the march to breakfast, the new

guy took his place in front of me. The guy who usually marched in that place began to tell the new fish off.

I quieted things down and the new guy kept his place.

He had a crest of thick white hair and baby-blue eyes. He was a skinny, dying-looking character who was unable to keep step while the company marched.

He took the food slopped out for breakfast and sat, throughout the meal, contemplating it.

As we neared the exit doors of the mess hall he encompassed the dining room with a sweep of his eyes and snarled, "Frigging idiots!"

I liked him. By the time we reached our cells I'd learned that his name was Mac, that he was serving a ten-year sentence, and that he couldn't figure out why the P.K. had assigned him to the school company. "He probably wants me to learn how to become a frigging idiot too!"

In school he was given the job of operating an automatic mimeograph — constructed specifically to save time and energy for its operator. Mac was immediately satisfied with the assignment.

"Millions of morons all over the world make a career out of working these things," he explained. "I figure I'll be able to manage it — all I need is a soft chair and plenty of reading material, partner."

There was an alertness about him that implied he was a New Yorker, but he addressed everyone as "partner" and all his *r*'s and *g*'s sounded clearly when he spoke. I thought him a Midwesterner. City breeding was unmistakable in every word and gesture and in the pattern of his thinking. I imagined he might be from Chicago. A Hoosier — Grade A brand.

The hipsters in the school company had a word for Mac — hinkey. He was not suspicious of a good-will nod, a greeting, or confidence — he was careful, hinkey. He accepted all overtures without ever intending to make the slightest return.

I was living like a plutocrat. My mother and sisters were able to send food packages and at least a three-dollar money order every month. Prison friends who were back in action came through with money orders — ten, twenty, and once fifty dollars. Too, the years in Dannemora had produced solid contacts in the mess hall,

warden's house, chaplains' offices, and other key spots which contributed lavishly to my well-being and that of my friends. Food, tailored clothing, contraband stove wire, pornography, and leather windbreakers stocked my cell and school lockers.

One quart of fresh milk was delivered to my cell each day. Though I felt the liquid was best for calves, the cream floating in the bottles made a fine flavoring for my coffee.

Giving Mac the skimmed milk was no proof that any of the same stuff of human kindness flowed through my veins. I had skimmed milk. I had no use for it and he was the nearest guy who might want it.

He took it without comment. He took it again and again, and after a week passing the bottle to him had become an established custom.

Except for coffee, bread, and an occasional forkful of whatever was fed to us, Mac ate nothing. He was the only man in the school company who did not fall in with the commissary line. He smoked State tobacco.

A friend and I were booking baseball games and percentages, permutations, and combinations worked so consistently for us that I had to use the classroom locker to store tobacco and cigarettes. I cut Mac in on the smokes.

He warmed up. Two or three times a day he would drop into the classroom. He'd stop by at my court for a few minutes every evening. He talked. He talked about the outside, about Europe, about the United States, about Canada and Mexico. He talked about places, people, swindles, and rackets. I got to know him through the stories he told.

After thirteen years in prison I had finally met a professional thief, a man undisturbed by complex philosophy or contradictory morality. Mac's concept of life was primitive and ingenuous: he thought living was good and that everyone should enjoy it to the utmost. His credo was equally direct and simple: he believed that between birth and death there existed only one virtue — loyalty. Loyalty to self, and loyalty to one's friends.

His world was inhabited by right people and suckers. Suckers made the world go around and everyone, even a right guy, was afflicted with the urge to be sucker. "It's what you've got to fight all the time or you're a goner," Mac explained. "Look at me, on

the turf all my life and the first time I ease up, the first time I act like a sucker, I'm in the can! Look at yourself. You give in to what someone told you is a decent impulse, and you're stuck with me. What you should have done is dump the milk down the toilet, partner."

Being stuck with Mac was a happy experience. He possessed an endless collection of made-to-order stories for prisoner audiences. Stories that would make his listener feel that he wasn't such a contemptible bastard after all.

Mac spoke of the great and the near great as though he had been breaking bread and sleeping with them all his life.

"Remember Jim Cruze? Greatest director of his time, partner. Started out as a bum and worked his way up to a fortune. One of the giants of his day, but odd as a three-dollar bill. Whenever he saw a dame dressed in white he was convinced she was a virgin. Everyone in Hollywood tumbled to it and Jim had more god-damned virgins calling on him for tryouts and picture parts than Polly Adler's doorman.

"Let me tell you about Mike Romanoff. He's one hell of a fine guy, partner! He's as much of a blue blood as Polly's left tit, but he's a gentleman and a good guy. People like and respect him. I remember one time . . .

"Sure I know Louella Parsons. Small-town magpie and a really nice gal, with the swellest guy in creation for a husband. He's a doctor. They're just as much in love with each other now as they were the day they met. Always got a kick out of seeing them holding hands and smiling at each other that way. Like a couple of lovesick kids. Very sweet. Very sweet.

"Partner, let me tell you about Betty Compson, Not Compton — she married Jimmy Walker. . . .

"I was loaded to the gills with heroin one day, and who do I run into but Lionel Barrymore. . . .

"Frisco Blackie . . .

"Marquis de Cuevas . . .

"Ruby Keeler . . .

"Wendy Barrie . . .

"Greta Garbo . . .

"Hedy Lamarr . . ."

Pick any name and Mac had a story to fit it. A story containing

exactly the right proportions of impertinence, cynicism, and smut to justify the resentment of the frustrated, the defeated, the hopeless. Mac was a master at his chosen calling — that of painlessly separating suckers from their hard-earned, unearned, or crookedly earned cash. He was proud of his ability. His pride was genuine, tempered by humility.

Mac was a genius whose solid talent has been overlooked because of the flamboyant personality of his lifelong friend Wilson Mizner. Racket and bunko squads all over the world have in their files literally thousands of unsolved cases involving fantastic, prodigiously profitable swindles which were born with Mac.

In Pigtown, the Irish section of Brooklyn, Mac stole brass door-knobs when he was about thirteen. The local junkman bought the loot and Mac's family were too grateful for the milk he brought home to question where he got the money for it.

"Stealing brass doorknobs is a tough racket even for a kid and the pay-off is less than chicken feed, partner. I quit it soon as I got in with some older guys in the neighborhood. There were four of us. Abie was the oldest. Abie wasn't sixteen yet, but he was a smart cooky. He was the only Hebe in the neighborhood but he carried a lot of respect in his fists. We always did like he said. We were on the cannon and the other mobs never bothered us because we were just snot-nosed punks, I guess. Anyway we had a picnic working the Brooklyn Bridge trolleys, the saloons, and once in a while Coney Island. In those days we razzle-dazzled every sucker."

Understandably, the methods employed by the young, untrained, inexperienced mob were violently crude. They would select a victim, generally a woman, in a crowded trolley, press around her, work up a noisy argument involving pushing and pummeling while one of the mob busied himself at opening her bag and extracting the purse.

"An old-time cannon spotted us one day and after we got the poke and were lamming he cut himself in with us. He showed us all the angles, he taught us how to work as though we knew what we were doing. By the time he finished with us we were pros."

Mac was the hook from the start. He learned how to turn a trouser pocket inside out, how to reach into a breast pocket, how to unbutton and rebutton an overcoat, how to glom the poke with-

out the sucker being aware of what was happening. It was easy and the mob was soon in the chips. But Mac had ideas.

"Partner, I figured the slobs on the trolley cars and in the saloons wouldn't be there if they had real bankrolls. I figured the fancy restaurants and hotels and theaters on Broadway were where the suckers with important money would be found. The boys said no dice, they were satisfied the way things were in Pigtown. I wasn't, so I cut out and teamed up with a New York mob."

During the years of Mac's apprenticeship in crime New York City's underworld was a tightly organized fraternity, embracing every category of criminal and operating under the immediate, personal protection of the police. Pimps, pickpockets, con men, heist men, burglars, and a myriad of lesser thieves paid tribute to the Law in exchange for territories where they could prey upon the suckers without fear of competition or arrest. Or, if an arrest had to be made, without fear of conviction.

"I wouldn't work any other way. If you got the cops on your side, what's there to worry about? Besides, what you pay the Law doesn't add up to one tenth of what you have to shell out to a mouthpiece."

Mac had worked with the Law all his life. He had contacts with the police in every large city in the United States. That the Law respected and protected him is evidenced by his official criminal record — a single conviction, after more than a half a century of criminal activity. Even that conviction would not have occurred if it hadn't been for the political dreams of a district attorney who could otherwise have been reached. Typically, the D.A. was not looking for thieves or swindlers; all he wanted from Mac were the names of two legitimate detectives who were peddling protection. Mac's refusal to rat cost him ten years in Dannemora. A right guy, he believed, is right all the way — even where cops are concerned.

The high point of Mac's career as a pickpocket was a big Fair in one of the Canadian provinces. The mob he worked with got exclusive rights to do their business without competition. A special detail of officers was assigned to arrest known or suspected pickpockets attempting to enter the fairgrounds. Local newspapers carried warnings designed to discourage the light-fingered gentry and the chief of police was fulsomely praised for his zeal in protecting the good citizens making a holiday of it at the fair.

According to Mac, "It was like picking up money from the sidewalk. We didn't even bother to empty the pokes. We filled grocery bags with wallets and a cop brought the loot to the chief's office. Every night after closing time we'd go to see the big man for our cut. He'd split it up to the penny and we always got the edge. Sure, there were lots of suckers beefing, but the chief handled them personally and we never had any heat on us."

Back in New York, Mac had a roaring time with his portion of the loot. He checked in at a fancy hotel, learned to appreciate fancy food, liquor, clothes, and women. He was introduced to the theater, to opium smoking, and to Wilson Mizner.

It was the same world Mac knew in Pigtown. A world of suckers and good people. But the perspective was different.

In Pigtown the sucker was an antagonist, an object of hatred and contempt. On Broadway and Fifth Avenue the sucker was a friend, the sucker was treated with commiseration, with paternal affection. Mac quickly learned that the gentle approach was infinitely more profitable than the old razzle-dazzle and to hell with the bastard.

"That was for me, partner! I turned out on the con and worked everything from the Rumanian box to shaking queers.

"Rumanian box? Well, I'll tell you. It's a box. A wood box with a crank and a slot. That's all. You get a sucker to put a dollar bill into the slot, you crank, and abracadabra, presto, out comes a five-dollar bill! You get the sucker to put the fin back into the slot, same routine, and what do you know! A ten-dollar bill. Next time around it's a twenty. You'd be surprised at how many suckers beg for a chance to buy it. They buy solid gold bricks, too, and bridges and oil wells."

Never smarten up a sucker! was the first commandment in Mac's bible. He did not hesitate to tell me in a vague, generalized way about the countless swindles and rackets he had been part of. He gave all the surface detail — the exciting, adventurous aspects. He never talked about the gimmicks, the inner works of the con game.

Mac did not clip or beat or rob a sucker. Whenever he gave an account of his activities, it was invariably and accurately based

on the verb "to work." Only the uninitiated imagine the grifter, the con man, the swindler, living a life of indolence. Mac's stories made it abundantly clear that grifting was work, real work. The time, energy, and effort required to find a sucker, set him up, and prepare him for the pay-off, reduced to hours, labor, dollars, and cents, makes a congressman's job seem a sinecure in comparison.

Mac's work took him all over the United States, but home, whenever he spoke of it, was Hollywood. To Mac, Hollywood was only incidentally the hub of the movie industry, the home of glamor. To Mac, Hollywood was the congregating point for the least obnoxious, most passive suckers in the world.

Hollywood was the rectangle formed by Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Reno, and San Francisco.

"I'm telling you, partner, something happens to them soon as they get to Hollywood. The little Iowa hayseed who wouldn't look at the *Saturday Evening Post* because it carried sinful pictures like brassieres and girdles comes to Hollywood and before you know it she's posing for picture postcards which are sent to Paris for the American tourist trade. It's a fact! Or take the fat slob who owns a string of banks or salami factories back East — he blows into Hollywood and right away he figures he's in, he figures the town was put up just for him — he leaves himself wide open.

"Even the movie people. You'd think they'd be smart. They get around, but, partner, take it from me, they go for all their publicity releases. Everyone is ripe for a play. They ask for it!"

After I had heard enough of Mac's stories they began to acquire a distinctive pattern. They were never dull, but the main characters were introduced with a regularity that tended to blunt anticipation. It was always Big Money and Big Names. And the former were invariably separated from the latter.

That Mac might be playing me for a sucker occurred to me right after he moved into the next cell. I didn't mind. I reasoned that as long as I knew I was being suckered I really wasn't a sucker. I had at least some degree of control over the situation. Besides, my affection and respect for Mac were genuine. I wanted to help make his stay in Dannemora as easy and pleasant as it could possibly be. His stories were amusing and exciting. They were an escape from the rigid realities of prison. Through them we became intimate in a very special way. When he recounted the

details of a swindle, a sex party, or a trip to England, he offered me his role and I took eager advantage of it. I did not believe everything he told me but I appreciated the richness, the inventiveness of his imagination. For me, the relationship between us eventually developed into a finely proportioned give-and-take proposition.

The main cause of my disbelief was Mac's utter, complete aloneness. He spoke about hundreds of friends, partners, acquaintances — but he never received a letter or a postcard from the outside. He spoke of money — of tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of dollars — and he did not have the price of a five-cent package of tobacco. I did not doubt that he had been around. I felt that he had made a lot of money in his lifetime. I knew that he was a professional thief and a good one, but I felt that he was a hell of a lot less than what he claimed to be.

One day I told him so.

For some reason too trifling to remember, I was in a bad-tempered mood. When Mac started on another of his stories I lashed out with all the meanness and venom I had been generating all day. I told him to cut it out. "For Christ's sake, get smart to yourself. How the hell long do you think I'm going to go for all the crap you've been dishing out?" And so on, more emphatically, more pungently.

Mac took it without comment. Later I apologized and we resumed our friendship but with this difference — there were no more stories, no more confidences from Mac. A couple of weeks after I blasted him Mac knocked for attention on the steel wall separating our cells. He handed me a letter to him and a note from him. The note asked would I please be good enough to answer the accompanying. "I'm a very poor letter writer and I know you can do a far better job of answering than I. Will appreciate your doing so. Thanks."

The letter was sent from Toluca Lake, Canoga Park, Hollywood, California. It opened with an exasperated. "You Old Son of a Bitch" and closed with "Adios, Partner, Jim Tully." The body of the letter acknowledged, briefly, the arrival of word from Mac and immediately launched into a blistering, blasphemous bawling out for not having been told immediately about Mac's difficulties with the Law. It went on to elaborate that in addition to Mac's cur-

rent troubles with the Law he had, unknowingly, lost another set-to some months before. The Law had taken over a five-thousand-acre ranch in Arizona merely because Mac had failed to pay back taxes on the property. And a mutual friend was in the clutches, in Ohio. Another mutual friend would write in a few days. Everything was fine at Toluca Lake, Tully's latest book, *Biddy Brogan's Boy*, was about to hit the stands, and Max Perkins promised to send a copy along to Mac. Adios, Partner. . . .

Jim Tully's letter was Mac's way of letting me know that he had been leveling with me all the way. I apologized again. Mac's correspondence took an upturn after that first letter. Word of his whereabouts spread. Every evening two or three letters would be scattered on his bed. More letters from Tully, letters from Wilson Mizner, letters from producers and directors, letters from movie stars and bit players, letters from hoodlums and madams. Accompanying the letters were checks and money orders.

Mac got his own milk and his own tobacco but he wasn't overjoyed about the new situation. "It would've been better if no one knew," he said unhappily. "This is penny-ante stuff and it leaves me wide open. Sure, partner, these are fine people. Good people. They're my friends and I'm loading them with my headaches — in my book a man don't do that to his friends. . . ."

Mac's moral and ethical standards might be open to adverse criticism, but his sense of loyalty was powerful and unshakable. It transcended such universal virtues as greed and love and hatred. Loyalty was the abstraction upon which Mac's representational self had been superimposed.

Through the years that Mac and I were cell neighbors, court partners, and friends he never suggested, directly or by innuendo, that someday we might meet on the outside, that someday we might team up to take the suckers. He spoke glowingly of rackets and angles and future plans but he made it unmistakably clear that I was never to be any more than a listener.

"Partner, this stealing racket is strictly a sucker bet. Sure, you can figure an angle to get away with it, but sooner or later you've got to get caught up with. Stick to what you're doing and I'll give odds you'll get out and what's more you'll never have grief.

"Look at these jerks!" He meant all the second and third and fourth and umpteenth offenders in the prison. "Look at them! They

spend all their lives in the can. All the time they're in, the only thing you hear out of them is they were framed or they never had a chance or some weepy crap. Frigging idiots! That's what they are. They get out and what do they do? Same goddamned thing they did to get in, in the first place.

"You are lucky enough to be a moron. You've got the edge. You stand a chance. Keep plugging away at those pictures, partner. You know what they say about banging your head against a wall? Well, you keep banging long enough and the wall is bound to give. Somebody outside is going to wonder how come a con spends his time making pictures and that somebody is going to get you out of here."

Mac's enthusiasm for my picture making kept me at it. He got Jim Tully interested and Tully got his friends interested. I had to stop day-dreaming about black white yellow tall short eager reluctant coy heavy thin young old women. I had to produce. Tully wanted pictures, John Sloan wanted pictures, Fiorello La Guardia wanted pictures, my mother and my sister wanted pictures, half the cons in Dannemora wanted pictures.

I did not have time to worry about the ineluctable mortality of hair. My hair.

I had to make pictures.

Mac did more than encourage. He nagged, he shamed, he bullied. Each time another bundle of pictures went out through the front gate, Mac pointed out that eventually, soon, the last batch would be sent, "and then, partner, you'll be going that way yourself."

The morning Mac left for the front office — for a suit of prison-made clothes, twenty dollars, and freedom — he shook hands and said good-by to everyone in the school company except me.

"That's the last I'll see of those frigging idiots," he said. He waved his hand to me. "Take it easy partner. Keep banging away with those pictures!"

THIRTY

I BANGED AWAY ZESTFULLY. I PAINTED IN THE CLASSROOM DURING the day and I drew in my cell every evening. My friends and my pupils sensed a purpose in my activity before I was aware that I had any purpose. "Keep banging away. You'll make it!" I heard the phrases constantly and it required only the most casual effort to believe them. "Making it" meant everything, and everything could mean only freedom. I had to make it. The odds were shifting in my favor.

In the beginning there was Prof Davis.

Then the Protestant minister and John and Dolly Sloan.

The prison psychiatrist and the prison psychologist.

The prison's cons — the burglars and the heist men, the cannons, swindlers, junkies, blackmailers, arsonists, rapists, murderers, and a lone, bewildered necrophile.

All with me. All confident I would make it. All demanding that I make it — for them.

John Resko #22818 was the ideal instrument for testing the persistent rumor floating around Dannemora that hope still existed. Ideal because if John Resko #22818, convicted murderer, commuttee from the electric chair, lifer, could make it, then there was real, palpable hope for all the others.

The method for making, for getting a handful of freedom, had been decided for me in a lower East Side tenement when one of my parents handed me a pencil and I learned that it was more fun to make pictures than to make letters or tell time or hitch rides on ice wagons. So pictures were the only way out.

One day in 1942 word spread through Dannemora that a couple

of big shots were on their way to inspect the prison. As usual, we were indifferent, cynical about visits from big shots. The officers passed the word to the cons and the cons assumed expressions of patience and content—thankful for the inspection tour only because it meant a slightly more palatable mess-hall menu while the visitors were around.

My class was hypocritically intent upon its work when they arrived. Big wheels, from the size of the escorting party, which included the captain of the guard, the principal keeper, and the warden. We knew that the average citizen or even politician never rated a turnout this impressive. Every con in the class, studiously bent over his drawing board, gave out with suppressed hostility. The bigger the wheels, the phonier they must be — a bitter fact established by countless inspections, investigations, official visits.

Prof introduced me to the two men in accordance with long-standing prison tradition:

"This is John, the instructor of this class."

"How d'you do?"

"How d'you do?"

"How d'you do?"

Pick any two males, white, between the ages of thirty and fifty and apparently possessed of sound minds and bodies, and there they were. They could have been a couple of governors or a couple of grocers or any combination in between.

The shorter of the two immediately proved himself a likable individual. I had done a sketch of Fratello, looking dour and dismal because of a capricious notion that his wife might be unfaithful. The finished drawing was still on the board waiting to be fixed, and the visitor, spotting it, evinced an interest. So much so that I untacked it and asked him to accept it. He hesitated but, at a nod from the warden, carefully rolled the drawing, thanked me, and wandered off in a circle of blue uniforms. The other, a tall, tanned, hatless man, refused to be taken off by the official party. He spoke to me about the class, the pupils, and the work being done. He was friendly and curious and he wanted to see other drawings or paintings I had done.

It worked out perfectly. We spent a long time discussing a large, surrealistic painting in which I had tried to explain how a murderer feels about the circumstances leading up to and the consequences

resulting from his violent outburst against himself and his society. It was one of those mornings when I was articulate. I felt and I knew that I was speaking intelligently and convincingly. I had a patient listener.

Before the inspection party left my classroom I told the big man about my correspondence with John and Dolly Sloan, about their interest in the paintings I was making.

"I'm sorry to tell you that Dolly died two days ago," he said. The rest of the party were already out of the room. "Don't feel too bad. You've still got a friend."

That evening Harry Stein visited my court for the first time in many weeks. He was boiling with excitement. "Those guys that were around today? The one you gave Fratello's picture to — do you know who he was?

"That was Sam Lewisohn! You know! Picasso, Rouault, Van Gogh — he collects them. Millionaire. Multimillionaire. Copper mines. Practically owns the Museum of Modern Art. Brother, that's the baby to get you out of here!"

The other guy, the big guy, was Carl Carmer. Harry had all the dope. "He writes. Wrote *Stars Fell on Alabama* and a couple of other books."

That same year, before the first winter snows, Sam Lewisohn was back. This time his companion was a young, disarming man who shook hands and meant it.

"Edgar, this is John, the man I was telling you about." It developed that Sam Lewisohn had brought his nephew to Danne-mora to see me. Curiosity? Vicarious thrill at speaking to a murderer? Sincere interest in a fellow human? I did not know.

The following summer Sam Lewisohn came to visit me again. Carl Carmer was with him. Not an official visit behind a screen and under the hawk eyes and sharp ears of a guard — they came on an inspection tour for the New York State Prison Commission of which Sam Lewisohn was a member.

We greeted each other and spoke like old friends. Sam Lewisohn, Carl Carmer, and John Resko.

Another year passed before I received permission to include Carl Carmer's name on my correspondence list.

Calculated? Of course. It was calculation growing out of a desperate need for freedom. Calculation based on the knowledge that

great intentions were less than nothing without help. Calculation determined by the rigid patterns of legal and correctional laws which allow the inmate the right to plead for freedom but deny its servants the indulgence of personal emotion.

In my first letter to Carl Carmer I wrote, "I wonder if everyone writing a first letter feels as uncertain as I? My intention is to make a good — an overwhelming — impression. . . . I feel like one of Kafka's characters, remembering important facts after the need for them has passed."

Carl had visited me two weeks before. He told me then that a Boston museum was interested in one of my paintings and that the *Saturday Review of Literature* was buying a number of my drawings. I wrote further, "Your visit has made my imagination restive and difficult to control. Since you have been up here I have completed a landscape, begun work on a painting depicting a fragment of life in Dannemora, and developed drawings for your poem play *Taps Is Not Enough* to the point where they are ready for the final phase."

From that time on, stimulated by Carl's encouragement, by his unceasing efforts in winning new friends for me, by his untiring zeal in my behalf, I painted, I sketched, I drew in a frenzy, mailing countless pictures to my family, to Carl Carmer, and to John Sloan. The conviction that freedom was in the palm of my hand, waiting to be grasped, was sufficient to produce great and frequent spasms of work. I wrote three letters each week — the maximum permitted in Dannemora — and each letter listed more paintings, more drawings, more watercolors. I made posters for the War Conservation Board, for the American Legion, for the Red Cross, for the National Maritime Union. I was awarded citations, expressions of gratitude, and, most important, offers of friendship.

Freedom became an actuality I could examine, evaluate. I could determine origins and directions, prerequisites and eventual rewards. For me, there existed nothing so important, so essential as freedom. Nothing so satisfying. Nothing so inspiring. I felt that if my life was to have any meaning whatever it could only be through the firmly buttressed sense that I was free to think and act without restraints other than those I imposed upon myself. I felt that freedom was not merely worth fighting for — as though there was a choice, or as though there was anything more important.

I felt that within the framework of any social order based upon specific concepts of morality, law, the will to survive and develop, the struggle for freedom — because of sociological imperatives — must be constant, everlasting, and on every social level. Any concession to the hostile forces set in action by the struggle was an admission of defeat. For those who refused to fight, who accepted defeat, slavery and imprisonment were precisely the conditions they demanded.

Freedom meant more than getting out of Dannemora. I was asking for the right to determine for myself the choice of clothing, food, and living quarters: I was asking for the right to struggle for those items, for the right to earn my own way in the world. Freedom meant giving up the assurance that I would get three meals each and every day, that I would be clothed against the cold of winter and dressed coolly for the summer's heat without more effort on my part than changing from one costume to the other. Freedom meant that I was consciously willing to forego the ease of a bed that was mine, rent-free, for the rest of my life.

THIRTY-ONE

THE IDEA OF PAINTING MY WAY OUT OF DANNEMORA BEGAN AS A notion, developed into a conviction, and, in time, jelled into a necessity. Besides escape, there are other, tried and proven ways for a convict to regain his freedom. A con can establish connections with sufficient political weight to force the main gate open enough to allow the lucky prisoner to squeeze out. It can be done and has been done. But connections are incredibly difficult to make and they cost an impossible amount of hard cash.

A con can concentrate on a particular statute of law containing a loophole allowing a technical, legal argument relative to his individual, particular trial, conviction, or commitment. He can then draw up the necessary, correct legal papers, present an overwhelming argument, and be freed. That has been done and will continue to be done as long as legal loopholes exist.

A con can offer himself as a sacrifice in the name of experimental science. Should he survive, a grateful society generally excuses him from further imprisonment. It has been done. I know one con who made it in that manner.

Or a con can come up with a prodigious invention — like a new type of propeller for fighter planes or a practical hydraulic device for shooting torpedoes more accurately out of submarines. These methods, too, have been successfully employed by ingenious convicts.

But nowhere in the annals of prison lore was there any recital of a convict winning freedom by wielding a brush. It has never been done. The authoritative consensus was that it could not be done. The “yes” and the “no” of the question was one of extreme import-

ance to me in the beginning. Eventually, painting stopped being a device for gaining freedom. It was more important to paint or draw as good a picture as I was able than to worry about whether or not anyone outside or inside might be pleased or displeased with it. I stopped giving any kind of a damn about anything except making pictures as well as I could.

Getting out, making it, was forever with me, but the physical, actual freedom became disassociated from the phenomenal freedom I found on the surface of a canvas. I painted constantly, in my cell and in the classroom. I gave up about half the recreation time allowed in the big yard. I stopped going to the movies — a minor sacrifice — and I cut out all my reading. The sign-painting class was transformed into a fully realized art class, a strange, unconventional kind of art class. Every member, myself included, was a student and each student a teacher. It was a group study project in which each member contributed all he could in the way of ideas, technical information, and criticism. It worked perfectly and in a short time the class was exhibiting regularly in New York, in Albany, and in Plattsburg.

Through the good offices of the Prof and newly appointed Warden Jackson, I was able to organize a library service for the art class — which later was extended to all other classes — making available to us all the books on art appreciation, history, and technique stored on the bountiful shelves of the New York State Teachers College and the New York State Public Library.

With the encouragement of Prof and the warden, the next, inevitable step was the legal acquisition of a 16-mm. projector, loud-speaker and screen. The Visual Education Program, promoted by the art class, became part of the over-all educational program of the Clinton Prison school. Since I had done most of the requesting, conniving, and politicking, responsibility for the program was left to me. I was told that selection of the films to be shown had to be related to and synchronize with the work being done in each class. A film catalogue was produced. A typewriter and hundreds of official letterheads put me in business.

I learned how to operate a projector.

The cons in the Clinton Prison school learned how salmon is caught, cleaned, cooked, and canned in Alaska.

How historic homes are restored in Virginia.

How clay pottery is thrown, glazed, and baked in Sturbridge.

How the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor.

How tin is mined in Bolivia.

How the Yankees won another World Series.

How the Roman alphabet evolved from primitive origins to present-day forms.

The convicts in the art class learned how to draw.

How to sculpt.

How to paint with watercolor.

How to paint with oils.

How to paint with casein.

How to paint with tempera colors.

The cons in the art class learned, too, how Alexander Brook paints a picture.

Robert Brackman paints a picture.

John Neuman paints a picture.

Most important, the cons in the art class learned that Alexander Brook paints a picture like Alexander Brook.

That Robert Brackman paints like Robert Brackman.

That John Neuman paints a picture like John Neuman.

The Visual Education Program was a success. Attendance was always at the SRO level and the general interest exceedingly high. We cons handled the thing ourselves and the presence of officers in the darkened rooms was provoked more by interest in the films to be shown than suspicion of skulduggery among the audience.

THIRTY-TWO

I HAD LONG HOPED THAT ONE DAY THE FIRST-DEGREE MURDER sentence I was serving would be cut to a second-degree murder sentence. Even in my dreams I felt that, if I asked for little and got just that, the little would be infinitely more than I had. I did not dream of or hope for a pardon or a radical reduction of the charge against me. Second-degree murder would have been a welcome blessing. From life to twenty-years-to-life. With good time off, in thirteen years and four months I would be eligible for parole. I did not think of the possibility that I might not be able to convince the Parole Board that I would be a good risk.

The thirteen years and four months passed. Fourteen years passed. Fifteen.

During my sixteenth year in prison Robert Gwathmey wrote to the governor:

"I have seen John Resko's work and consider it mature in style and readily marketable. The wonder to me is that his attainments could reach such a high degree in the confines of a penal institution. Suffice it to say that the association in free society so often necessary to the production of art should propel this man into a wonderfully expressive future. I might add that such an example not only speaks much for the individual, but for Dannemora as well."

John Sloan wrote to the governor:

"I was pleased to look at the linoleum cuts designed by John Resko. It is my honest belief that these indicate decided talent and ability as an artist."

Georges Schreiber wrote to the governor:

"There seems to be no doubt that Resko has talent, judging from

the few examples of his work. No matter how serious the crime of his youth might have been, it seems to me that every opportunity for rehabilitation should be accorded to him.

"Neither knowing Resko personally nor the details of his case, I am passing my recommendations solely on the work done by him."

Bernard Karfiol wrote.

Boris Artzybasheff wrote.

Philip Evergood, Gifford Beal . . .

These, and dozens of others expressing the same views, wrote because of Carl Carmer's conviction that I might make a positive contribution to society. That I had fashioned for myself the equipment to do so. That I had succeeded in effecting a personal rehabilitation.

The governor, the attorney general, the commissioner of correction, were not as easily impressed as my family. My sister wrote that Mom had a "feeling" so positive that she had already bought pajamas, underwear, socks, handkerchiefs, shirts, and ties in preparation for my certain homecoming — a suit, which I could purchase myself, would effect the transformation from convict to free man.

I "felt" it too, but with reservations. The reality of freedom was too much to grasp. Dreaming, hoping, working, and even fighting for it was one thing — accepting it, much as I longed for it, was another.

Long before the first snows of 1948, I had made arrangements with friends to receive all the New York City and Albany newspapers every day, as soon as they were delivered. I was not interested in any news except that being released by the governor's office. The particular item I was waiting for would not, could not appear before Christmas week. I was preparing myself for the traditional list of holiday commutations given each year as an official gesture of Good Will Towards All Men. As Christmas week approached, all my reservations, all my doubts were lost in a frenzy of certainty. After the "All Quiet!" bell I'd lie in bed smoking one cigarette after another, tense with the sureness that this was it. There could be no failure. My friends were searching through the papers before they were delivered to the subscribers and I was dividing possessions accumulated through the years, making mental notes that this was for Archie, this for Jimmy, this for Rocks, and

I must not forget Frank and Foots, and so on and so on until I'd fall asleep from exhaustion.

On the morning December 23, 1948, I was awake when the six o'clock bell aroused the prison. From the far end of the cell block steel doors slammed open and slammed shut and the rattle of tin lunch boxes, the off-beat jangle of keys, played counterpoint to the great banging of steel and concrete. The day shift of company guards was coming on duty. The sneaky sounds of men getting out of bed, of brushing, sweeping, scrubbing, coughing, belching, urinating, built up in volume. Then the first voice of the day, calling to Tony the Shoemaker:

"Hey, Tony! Tony! Ya made it, kid! Ya made it!"

"Wadda ya doin, kiddin? Where'd ya hear that crap?"

"No! No! I swear! It's on the level, Tony. I just got the wire."

"Yeah? Well, I'll wait until I'm outa the front gate. . . ."

"Okay, kid! But I'm tellin ya . . ."

Someone asked the guy whether Willie Flack made it.

"No. Imagine! Thirty-six years ain't enough fa the bloodsuckers. They'll never give him a break. . . ."

"How's about Patsy?"

"No good. This year they're tryin to make it look good while they give everybody a hosin. Only one from each joint. One from Sing Sing, the man says, an one from Comstock an one from Auburn an one from Greenhaven an don't forget that good kid Tony the Shoemaker in Dannemora. The bastids!"

The guy with the wire was drowned out by the awakened men within earshot. Everyone accepted his news as gospel. Everyone but me. I did not hear my name mentioned as one who made it. It was a rumor. It was pure guess. It was malice. No one in Dannemora could know. The daily papers had not yet reached Dannemora and even the guards could not know. I refused to believe anything until I read the papers. I sweated the day out on bicarb.

I knew before I got to the cell that evening, before I began looking through the newspapers, that my name would not appear in any of them. My friends had been too kind, too solicitous all day. They had discussed trifling things with too much vehemence. They had known early that morning.

I could not give up. I spent the evening convincing myself that this was a scheme concocted at the governor's request. That a

commutation had been granted me but for personal, political, religious, social, and a thousand other reasons the governor had decided to sneak me out of Dannemora.

It failed to hit me until the next morning — the day before Christmas — when a guard came to escort Tony the Shoemaker to the Administration Building and to freedom. I got it while shouting congratulations and farewell to Tony. I hated his guts for having made it. All I could think of was that if it had not been Tony it would certainly have been me.

I spent all day feeling a bitter hatred for officialdom in general and the governor in particular. I felt a great compassion for my family and the agony of disappointment they were suffering.

That evening I painted a self-portrait — a double self-portrait. I pictured myself as an eyeless, partially decomposed skull hung by a chain on a steel wall. In the lower right-hand corner I pictured myself again, unclothed, sitting on an empty crate, hopelessly contemplating my skull.

I was feeling mighty sorry for myself.

THIRTY-THREE

THE OFFICIAL ATTITUDE TOWARD THE CLEMENCY APPEAL FOR John Resko #22818 was expressed in a lean note to Carl Carmer: "I regret to inform you that it has been determined that executive clemency is unwarranted in this case."

In April an event occurred which jolted my hopes into renewed activity. The *Saturday Review of Literature* ran an article about a lifer in a New York State prison. It was an unadorned, factual report about a convict who, almost two decades before, had shot and killed while attempting to rob the victim. The murderer had been captured. He had admitted the slaying. He had been tried, convicted, and sentenced to die in the electric chair. Then sentence of execution had been commuted to life imprisonment. In prison the lifer adapted himself to the rigid requirements of institutional rules and regulations. He worked steadily at improving himself and in eighteen years' time had taught himself to draw and paint well enough to find a ready market for his talents. In eighteen years' time he had organized and taught a prison art class which institution officials admitted was a success from both a vocational and a therapeutic standpoint. Period.

No tear jerking. No sloshy sentimentality. No appeal — for anything Carl Carmer wrote the article.

He wrote about me.

Accompanying the article were reproductions of a half dozen pictures of mine and an editorial note in which Norman Cousins explained that the *Saturday Review of Literature*, convinced of the rightness of Carl Carmer's determination to help the lifer, had joined the fight.

The article drew a phenomenal response. From every state in the United States, from Europe, from the Caribbean, from Canada, hundreds upon hundreds wrote to the *Saturday Review of Literature* and to Carl Carmer. Men and women. People. Farmers, hardware merchants, housewives, cops, librarians, accountants, teachers, prison guards, salesmen, two convicts, and one intransigent objector. All but the objector patiently, enthusiastically, compulsively, according to their individual temperaments, wrote that the man about whom Carl Carmer wrote had earned for himself another chance at freedom.

The objector felt that what was good enough for his father was good enough for him: "If a man takes the life of another man, then his life should be forfeit — regardless."

The article drew an astonishing response from another quarter, which was highly official. It told Carl, in effect, to mind his own business. "The handling and disposition of these matters should be left to duly constituted authority," it said.

To support this point of view, Carl was informed that information of a privileged nature indicated that John Resko was:

Suffering from a severe mental illness.

Was in such a physical state that he could not perform a day's work.

Had been a dangerous criminal since he was six years old.

Take your pick, Mr. Carmer.

Mr. Carmer is a reasonable man. He is more than willing to meet anyone halfway and he would like to accept things at their face value. The report on the fearful state of my mind and body disturbed Carl.

He had been visiting me at least once each year and he had always found me in fairly good physical shape. I was always well tanned, my eyes were clear, I never complained of aches, pains, dizzy spells, or spots before my eyes. He knew I liked to play baseball and handball. He saw that I was conducting a class of about forty adults, and had been, every day for almost twelve years.

Moreover, Carl and I had been corresponding for several years. In my letters I did not hesitate to plunge into discussions on abstract subjects nor was I reluctant to expound ideas. Mentally, I was not too sluggish.

The course of my preadolescent and adolescent life was ob-

scured somewhat by my mother's loyal insistence that I never did a wrong thing, that I was a good, obedient, angelic child and boy. The fact that I never missed a day in school from the time I was five until I left high school was much more important to Mom than my getting into fights, building bonfires on Election days and Thanksgiving, hitching rides on wagons, automobiles, and trolley cars. My winning medals and awards for track, swimming, and playing the violin blinded her to my decided preference for girls, my enjoyment in kissing them and, in the dark security of my bed, dreaming of greater intimacies.

I was a good student. I worked during summer vacations and I thought Jack Dempsey, Mickey Walker, and Teddy Roosevelt were the greatest men the world had produced. I thought the Huns were skunks and ditto for Aaron Burr and Benedict Arnold. I made the first superheterodyne radio set on the block, and I built a scale model, of the dove-shaped Spad, that actually flew. I never heard of Da Vinci, Memling, Goya, Fragonard, Daumier, Van Gogh, Glackens, or any artist but James Montgomery Flagg. I dreamed of being a success without having the faintest idea of how I was to attain it.

Could these things, subjected to a dialectical analysis, have made me a socially dangerous criminal?

Carl Carmer did not think so and, being a neat, orderly person, he investigated the commissioner's assertions concerning my mental and physical health. He secured official reports from Dannemora. Guards' reports, doctors' reports. Psychiatrists' reports. In essence the reports stated that I was well behaved, congenial, studious, and did my job conscientiously. I was five feet eight inches in height, I weighed one hundred and fifty pounds. I was male, white, thirty-eight years of age. My eyes, ears, nose, throat, lungs, vital organs, penis, testes, and anus were in average and better health — no signs of morbidity from head to feet. My reflexes were fine. My mental age was rated at sixteen or sixteen plus and my intelligence quotient was about 170.

I was not yet ready for the bughouse or the invalid's bed.

I was a pretty healthy guy.

I continued to paint and I continued to send my paintings to my family and to Carl. It was the only way I could neutralize the ten-

sion. The Giants were lost somewhere in the National League and that did not help.

Carl wrote: "I was delighted to hear that you are using your creative abilities so busily, and I could tell from the quality of the pictures which arrived that you are in a fertile and industrious period.

"Your drawing of my home, Octagon House, arrived on my birthday and of course I was delighted with it. . . . We hope that you will see it before long and I am doing what I can toward that end.

"I have not the faintest idea whether the requests for reports on you are to be interpreted optimistically, but I feel confident that before too long a time has elapsed the authorities who control your destinies will take favorable action on you.

"I hope you will continue to write me about your work and yourself. Too few of the public as a whole, I believe, ever give thought to the problems of men situated as you are, or for that matter to the administration of such institutions as that in which you live."

The reports to which Carl referred had been requested by the Department of Correction. That was in July. In early August Carl and Sam Lewisohn came up to Dannemora. It was a cheerful, sunny day and I felt good on my way out to the visiting room where my two friends were waiting.

Another thing about Carl Carmer — there is not an atom of cruelty in him. He told me, gently and sadly, that he had just come up from Albany where he had had an interview with the governor's legal counsel.

"They absolutely refuse to consider your application for clemency, John. All they would concede was that eventually, perhaps next year or the year after or the year after, you will be freed."

He could have let me find out the hard way.

Well, that was that.

I was numb for a long time before I could say to myself once more, "Maybe next year . . ."

THIRTY-FOUR

I COULD REMEMBER BACK SOME SIXTEEN YEARS WHEN FLOYD LA Rock was one of the screws in charge of the weave shop. I cannot think of a single con who had a good word for him, who liked him. A good many of his fellow screws did not hesitate to echo the con's sentiments. La Rock was a tough screw.

He did his job by the book and he played no favorites. If the book said "No!" and you did it, La Rock was sure to lock you up and lodge a severe report against you. La Rock was also intelligent, and he was ambitious. He took all civil service examinations and steadily earned promotions. Acting sergeant. Permanent sergeant. Lieutenant. Captain. After each promotion the resentment against him increased. He never smiled. He never joked. He did his job by the book.

La Rock was a rugged, handsome man with a stern mouth and a bleak look in his eyes. After he became a permanent sergeant he got into the habit of dropping into the art class once or twice every week. He made us nervous. He would walk from desk to desk, silently surveying the work being done, and after he had seen everything he would leave without a word. We figured he was snooping, looking for something that would get us into trouble.

I was sure of it the day I got two pounds of modeling clay. He noticed it immediately and wanted to know where I got it. It was legitimate and I told him.

He nodded. Then he said, "Modeling is lots of fun but it doesn't compare to sculpting. You know, I was a sculptor before I took the job in here. I had my own studio. In Boston." That probably accounted for the unhappy look about his eyes.

He began visiting my class more frequently. He would hang around until the pupils left and I'd have forty-five minutes or an hour to myself. We would talk. About art and literature. About crime and punishment and rehabilitation. About world affairs and our own problems. He had a probing, incisive, analytical mind and I enjoyed the talks. My attitude toward him had always been neutral. He had never bothered me and I never gave him the opportunity to. I began to develop a positive feeling about him, so much so that I put myself on the spot defending some of his actions. But I never could figure him out. I never could get beyond the surface of the man. His opinions were cautious and his conclusions logical. Neither were ever touched by his emotions.

He knew about my appeals for executive clemency, about Carl Carmer and the progress of my desire for freedom.

"These things take time," was his guarded opinion.

One day I was modeling a head when La Rock came into the classroom.

"Are you going to cast it?" he wanted to know.

"I'd like to if I can get the plaster."

"Do you know how to cast?"

I was not too certain.

He called the paint shop and in a few minutes a large bag of plaster was delivered to my room. It was a hot day and La Rock took off his hat and coat. We got an empty tin can which we cut into two-inch-square pieces.

"We'll use these for dividers. They'll do as well as brass. Set them in right around here." He indicated where and while I pressed the metal into the green clay he explained why the particular place had been selected for the dividers. "We'll make a plaster mold. It won't make much difference where the mold divides — the idea is to get the clay out cleanly and easily."

He showed me how to mix the plaster, how to tint it for the first layer over the clay. "You'll find when you separate the mold there will be spots that have to be chipped away. The tinted plaster will warn you that you're close to the cast." He was throwing the plaster, talking, sweating. He was having a wonderful time.

The head was cast by La Rock. He separated the mold, cleaned the cast, and shellacked it with his own hands. He knew his busi-

ness. Immediately after lunch and not much more than one hour after he had made the cast, I had it packed, ready for the mails.

One of La Rock's duties at the time was supervising the package room. I brought the package to him, explaining that I wished to send it to my family. He unwrapped the plaster head which he had cast, examined it, nodded with satisfaction. "Nice job, but I can't allow you to send it out."

Why?

"Rules forbid it. There could be a contraband note concealed in the plaster." He knew there was no such note or anything but the plaster he poured into the mold, but the rules said "No" and he would not make any exception.

That was La Rock, Captain of the Guards, Clinton Prison, Dannemora, New York.

Shortly after Carl and Sam Lewisohn made their unhappy visit to me — not more than two or three days — Captain La Rock appeared in my classroom. No stalling. No vaseline.

"After your company comes out of the mess hall I want you to fall out, go to your cell, and pack your things. I have another job for you."

Another job? The man was crazy! A lunatic. A low-grade idiot. Who was going to run the class? My class. What was he trying to do? Make me blow my top? . . . I didn't want another job. I was satisfied with the job I had. I liked the job I had. No one was going to separate me from the job I had. I'd write to the governor, I'd see the warden. I refused. I put on my hat and coat — I wanted to be locked up.

I went, protesting, to the Prof's office.

The Prof, startled and dismayed, tried to reason with La Rock, who listened as impassively as the granite statues he once carved. The Prof was going to see the warden immediately. He was going to do something about this.

A guard stationed at the mess-hall exit motioned me out of line. I was ordered to follow him. To D Block. To my cell.

"Pack up! You're moving."

I refused. I wanted to see the warden. He shrugged, locked me in the cell, and went off.

Almost immediately footsteps padded up to my cell. Eddie Ryan,

one of D Block's crew of gallery men and my good friend for many years.

"What's up, John? Why've they locked you up?"

All the time I was telling him the story, he polished his glasses, peering nearsightedly at the crystal-clear lenses.

"What job does he want you to take?"

I did not know.

"I'll find out. I'll be right back." He padded off.

I felt better once part of my problem had been shifted over to a fellow con. And it could not have been a better guy than Eddie Ryan. Levelheaded and reasonable. I never knew him to be otherwise and I had known him, been friendly with him, for many years. The "Snakes" inserted between his given and surnames failed to register in connection with the personality of Edward Ryan. He was studious, intelligent, a prodigious reader. He was quiet and he never interfered in other people's affairs. He played bridge brilliantly and he played a strong game of chess. I cannot think of a single con or guard who cherished an active dislike for Eddie.

He returned in a few minutes.

"The transfer slip just says 'Hospital.' Maybe it's not wise to refuse. You can't afford a black mark against you now — that's all that would be needed to finish off your clemency appeal for good."

I packed. The guard came back and in a half hour Eddie and I were depositing the bundles that made up my possessions on the clinic floor. I had a new job.

Doc was the bald, dapper man in charge of the prison hospital. He was Doc to everyone in Dannemora. He could perform an appendectomy in ten minutes and leave no trace of the operation beyond a barely noticeable dimple. He removed tonsils, eyes, bullets, kidneys, arms, fingers, hands, gall bladders, legs, testes, hemorrhoids. There was hardly a man in Dannemora playing baseball, football, basketball, handball, who had not at one time or another during his sojourn within the walls placed himself under Doc's knife.

Every morning at nine o'clock Doc was seated behind the narrow window in the clinic dispensing pills, tonics, physics, ointments, and advice. He was an adept at bullying the hypos and commiserating with the genuinely ill.

After the clinic session Doc could be found in the operating room

where four or five operations before lunch were not unusual. He spent early afternoons with the TB patients on the top floor of the new four-story hospital.

He said to me, "La Rock spoke to me about you. Are you pretty good at learning things?"

I nodded.

"Okay. Let's go." We left his office and stopped at the nurses' room. Doc introduced me and told the two civilian nurses, "Resko is the new X-ray technician. He rates as an R.N. and I want him treated that way. You show him around, Joe."

Joe kept asking how come I was assigned to that particular job. "Did you ever do this kind of work?" I said no. "Well, I guess I'm elected. I'll show you what you're supposed to do. First, this is the X-ray room and that's the machine. If you have any questions ask them right away. Don't worry about interrupting me."

I forgot all about my goods lying in bundles on the clinic floor while Joe pointed out the various parts of the X-ray machine, identified an impossible assortment of dials, switches, meters and indicators in the control room, and repeatedly warned me against over-exposing myself to the rays.

Adjoining the X-ray room was the darkroom where Joe showed me how to develop film and how to load cassettes.

He took shots of my hands and I followed each step of the operation from the moment when he anchored my forearm with a sandbag to the viewing of the developed film against a fluorescent light.

"Okay. Now you take a shot of my hand and go through the routine just the way I did."

I loaded a small cassette in the darkroom. I set it under the X-ray tube, put Joe's hand on it, anchored his arm the way he had with me, entered the control room, and, mindful of the dangerous character of X-rays, shut the leaded door behind me. I forgot about calibration, pressed a likely-looking button which provoked a buzz from the machine.

In the darkroom I went through the same motions Joe had a few minutes before and when I finally held the film up to the light I felt proud as an old pro. Through the opaque blackness of the film glowed a dim image of the skeletal contents of Joe's hand.

"Okay. You need practice and I'll work with you for a week."

He selected several books dealing with X-ray technique from the desk in the anteroom — my desk — suggesting that I read them carefully.

“Okay, come along, I’ll show you your room.”

A real room.

A room with a wooden door and a large window — without bars.

A room with a bed and a chair and desk.

A room with a closet.

A room without a toilet, without a sink, without steel walls, without rivets and a drain in the center of a concrete floor.

My room.

I was too busy to think about the art class. This new job was something.

I had the best job in Dannemora.

I had a job that gave me thirty cents a day, allowed me to have my own radio, electric stove, and electric iron. I was entitled to special laundry privileges, barbershop privileges, and the right to keep my room light on all night if I wanted. From 7 A.M. to 7 P.M. I was allowed anywhere in the prison without a pass or guard escort. From 7 P.M. to 7 A.M. I was allowed anywhere in the hospital.

It was the nearest thing to being free.

I really dug into the books on X-ray techniques that night.

THIRTY-FIVE

THE NEXT DAY I LEARNED THERE WAS A LOT MORE TO THE JOB — all good. I was on a special-rations list. A pork chop, to most people, is a hunk of meat they eat once or twice a week. Don't have it during the middle third of your life, and a pork chop becomes something sensational. Ditto for a lot of other ordinary foods.

According to law, a doctor treating a civil service patient for an injury involving compensation has his fee paid by a board set up for that purpose. Since part of the fee included the cost of taking X-rays, I received a share each time a prison employee was hurt on the job. In addition and related to my job as X-ray technician, I had charge of the fracture room, the basal metabolism room and equipment, and the radiocardiograph room and equipment. I had charge of the whole floor of the hospital's East Wing.

Just about one week of coaching and supervision by Joe was sufficient. He taught me enough about X-ray technique and procedure for me to take over on my own.

One of my earliest patients was a former schoolmate who complained of a persistent bellyache. Doc's slip instructed me to take pictures of the pelvic area. By this time I knew all about milliamperes, buckys, A.P.s, P.A.s, and obliques. Since we had been associates, I decided ^{*}he deserved the works. One each. P.A., A.P., and oblique.

He managed a painful grin when I yelled, "Smiiiiile!" just before taking the picture. The pictures were excellent. Clearly defined, well centered, not too dark, not too light. Perfect except that each film showed a sharp white area about the size of a dime which

looked as though someone had scratched the film with the point of a knife. Defective film.

I reloaded the cassettes and took another set of pictures. Same thing.

Since I had to account for every film I used, I thought I'd better show these to Joe.

"Jesus Christ!" Joe grabbed the pictures and dashed out through the darkroom's side door, heading for Doc's office. He was back in a few minutes to hustle my onetime associate up to one of the wards. I heard him call to the other civilian nurse, "I've got to prepare this guy for surgery!"

I felt pleased with myself for having been the agent in bringing my school chum's sad plight to light. Doc came in dressed for an operation. He ordered me to load all the small cassettes available.

"Ever watch an operation?"

I had not.

"Well, we are going to need you for this one. Just keep your head and do exactly as Joe tells you. He'll help you." He held the pictures under his arm.

The X-ray control room was situated between and connected to two large rooms. One was the room in which I had been working. I knew the other only as the Sisk Room and had not yet gotten around to inquiring about it. It was a big, lonely-looking room containing a single piece of furniture. A table. A weird table on a steel pedestal. An out-of-shape table full of sharp angles and bristling with arms, cranks, stirrups, wheels, ratchets, levers, straps.

Good thing Joe was there to keep me hopping. I forgot everything he taught me soon as Doc started slicing. I took and developed pictures every few minutes throughout the operation. Doc used them to get his bearings as he went along step by step until he held up a bloody clot which dropped into a pan with a sharp clink.

My end of the job was done at that point and it was not until after the patient had been taken up to the postoperative ward that I became curious enough to ask what had been the matter with him.

"He had a ball of wire in his urethra "

It made no sense but it aroused a desire to know. Bits of information from various sources including Webster, pieced together, added up to a simple story. The patient had stripped the fine wire from around the magnets in his earphones, he had wadded it into

a compact mass, hooked it to a heavier piece of wire, and inserted the whole business into his urethra. One night the mass of fine wire became detached from the heavy wire and lodged deep in his urethra — in fact, against his bladder. That's what the matter was.

The whole affair was nothing more than a radical attempt at creating new fields for masturbation.

THIRTY-SIX

THE SENSATION OF FREEDOM PROVIDED BY MY NEW JOB AND MY interest in the job itself left me no time for painting. Medical books replaced art books and I stopped thinking of painting. I had been an X-ray technician about two months and was able to do a fairly-good job when Doc sent a man in for pictures of his sinuses. Tough pictures to take but I managed after a half dozen attempts. Doc was pleased with the progress I was making and told me so when he returned the sinus pictures for filing.

I studied the pictures after he left and the only thing I could see in them was an astonishing resemblance to portraits by Tchelitchev. That started me off. Tchelitchev, Tanguy, Ernst, Blume . . .

I brought my paints, canvas, and easel into the Sisk Room. The advent of December with its Christmas holiday failed to disturb me thanks to Carl's frankness about my chances for freedom. Having caught the rhythm of the hospital, I found ample time to paint and read.

The only disquieting event occurred in early December when I received a tender, devious letter from my sister. My mother had suffered a severe stroke a couple of weeks before. She had not been expected to survive it and to spare me unnecessary hurt my sister had kept the news from me. However, Mom had pulled through. She was very weak, but the prospect for the coming holiday was brighter.

As far as I was concerned the approaching Christmas could be nothing less than a miserable bust. I was completely indifferent to prison rumors about commutes. I refused offers of newspapers and

wrote my family begging them not to send me holiday packages. In spite of my wonderful new job I was in the dumps.

When a new guard came into the X-ray room looking for Resko #22818 I was sure my sister had sent a package. I followed the new man and when we left the hospital building and he had not picked up any other cons it suddenly dawned on me why I was being called out.

"Are we going to the package room?"

The guard shook his head. "No. You're wanted in the front office."

That confirmed it. I was being called out for a death visit.

The warden and principal keeper were in Albany on official business. Captain La Rock was acting warden. He sat behind the warden's desk, unsmiling, almost menacing.

"Do you like your job in the hospital?"

My heart leaped. It wasn't a death visit after all!

"Yes, of course I do. Why? What is this all about?"

"I've got to take you out of there."

The thought that I was being framed was immediate.

"Why? Why? What happened?"

La Rock nodded in the direction of a chair beside his desk. "Sit down!" He pushed a pack of cigarettes toward me. "Take one. Have a smoke." He fiddled with a stack of papers while I cautiously lit up and took a deep drag. He said, "Today I performed the most pleasant and satisfying act since I've come to Dannemora."

He moved the papers towards me. "I signed these. They're your commutation papers."

I waited for the punch line, grinning.

"You are going home tomorrow."

Did you every try to grin while you are crying? It's not easy. La Rock looked away. He understood.

After a while he said, "All right. That's enough! Stop it!" It was an order. I stopped.

"Smoke another cigarette, then go to the Bertillon Room for fingerprints and pictures. After that to the guardroom. They'll fit you out with clothes." He held out a slip of official-looking paper. "This is a requisition for a train ticket to New York and twenty dollars in cash. Bring it to the cashier in the morning." He stood up and we shook hands.

"You're a good artist, John, don't louse it up by pushing things too quickly when you're home again."

Imagine being asked what preferences I had for clothes! The guard in charge was really leaning over backwards for me.

"Anything. Anything! *Anything!* What difference does it make?"

I got a gray suit and a gray overcoat. Not the flat, unrelieved prison gray. These grays had specks of black and brown in them. I got a gray hat and when the guard was not looking I slipped the red feather out of the band. I got a white shirt and I selected a black tie — all the other ties seemed too garish, too violently colored. The guard showed me how to tie a knot. He promised to help me the next morning. I got black shoes and black socks.

I was fingerprinted and mugged.

Then I was sent back to the hospital to wait for the morning.

THIRTY-SEVEN

A RADIO NEWS BROADCAST ANNOUNCED THAT A LIFER, JOHN RESKO, had been granted a Christmas commutation that morning. It was old news in Dannemora. The papers had beaten the broadcaster by about fifteen minutes. By the time I reached the hospital the word had spread throughout the prison.

Well, maybe. Maybe it was a mistake. Maybe it was a dream.

Guys were shaking my hand, slapping my back, congratulating me, but I was worried about the dream angle.

Willie Flack, who expected to make it after thirty-seven years in Dannemora, came to shake my hand. We smiled at each other and I knew he hated me for having made it instead of Willie Flack. Inside I was saying, "Take it easy, Willie, maybe we'll wake up and everything will be all right between us."

I began giving my things away. Paints, canvas, brushes, art books, into a pillowcase — for Archie. Books books pants shirts more books fountain pen pipes books soap towels toothpaste books. For Dick for Blackie for Jimmy for Tom, for Christ's sake think hard, don't forget anyone.

I put a towel, soap, razor, toothbrush, and paste aside. I'd take a shower in the morning and a shave before leaving.

At eleven o'clock that night the civilian night nurse came into my room with hot coffee and sandwiches. "Man, you'd better stop knocking yourself out or you'll never make it until morning."

"Tom, tell me the truth. They're not kidding?"

"Oh, for Christ's sake!"

At midnight the night captain came in to congratulate me, to wish me well. He was the first guard I knew in Dannemora who was kind to the men placed in his charge. We were old friends.

"Sure it's true, Johnny. Sure it's true."

I believed him. He and Tom urged me to take a sleeping pill. I took two and an hour later I was at Tom's desk asking him to prove, in some conclusive way, that it was true. I couldn't sleep. The pills acted like stimulants.

Mentally, I arranged in alphabetical order the names of all the friends to whom I planned to write. That took up another hour. My watch was lagging. I was convinced it was much later than the three-thirty it showed. I could not remember having wound it for several days. Through the window the sky seemed bright enough to suggest dawn. They'd be coming for me soon and I wasn't ready. I took a shower. I shaved. I brushed my teeth and combed my hair. I cleaned my nails and filed them. I stepped into clean shorts, I drew on clean socks. I put a clean, pressed handkerchief aside for my going-home suit.

I woke Tom, who was dozing at his desk. His watch said four-twenty. I had another cup of coffee. Tom reassured me that in a few hours I would be chug-chugging away for home. I went back to my room and looked through the album of snapshots my sisters had sent me through the years. I read all the letters I had saved. I destroyed most of them.

Tom's watch agreed with mine — five forty-five. I would not allow myself to think of the outside. In the event this was true I certainly was not going to jinx it.

The racket made by the cooks and mess-hall men getting things under way in the hospital kitchen was like a signal. The sky became brighter. There were sounds of movement throughout the prison. The cell block bells shrilled across the yard, reaching into the hospital, into my room, telling me there were only minutes left, telling me that if this was a dream, now was the time to wake up.

Everything was the same. I was standing by my bed holding a clean handkerchief in my hand — a handkerchief especially chosen for my going-home suit.

Sure I had breakfast. I was not going to let a little thing like going home interfere with an established routine of nineteen years' standing. Besides, if all this turned out to be some sort of cruel joke, December 24, 1949, would be just another day in Dannemora and all days in Dannemora must begin with breakfast — the rule book says so.

I had breakfast and a dozen cups of post-breakfast coffee before my name was called.

It was true all right. It was true. I concentrated on the thought in an effort to control a sudden weakness in my bladder.

I moved like a grinning zombie beside the guard who had come to pick me up. I did not need a haircut. I did not want a haircut. But rules and regulations say that each man is to be given a haircut before he is discharged. I got a haircut. Sensing my impatience, the Greek gave me a quickie involving much flourishing of arms and snipping of scissors without endangering the perfectly good haircut I already had.

"So long, Greek, and thanks."

"So long and take it easy."

"So long, Mike."

"So long, Tim."

"So long."

"So long."

I went down the line of barber chairs. Suddenly I realized what was happening. I was saying good-by to these men. For good. I had lived with them argued with them fought with them laughed with them bitched with them wept with them and now I was leaving them.

I wanted to go back to say good-by all over again. To tell them that this had to be. This was what I wanted. That we'd see each other again and talk it over.

In the guardroom two other guys were waiting to make the homeward journey. Boots and Blackie. Three years four months each. We knew each other and another round of congratulations was in order. We stripped off our prison uniforms and got into our civilian clothes. Boots and Blackie had everything sent from home. Sharp, draped suits, brilliant neckties, smart tweed topcoats. My suit felt heavy, formless, uncomfortable.

We got our twenty dollars each, our railroad tickets, and a guard finally said, "Let's go!"

From the main entrance of the Administration Building to the front gate is about two hundred feet. I began to count the steps as I walked toward freedom.

One two three four five six seven eight nine ten eleven twelve
thirteen fourteen fifteen sixteen seventeen eighteen nineteen . . .

Nineteen years being left behind.

Nineteen years . . .

The guard at the front gate stuck his hand out.

"So long, John, hope I never see you again."

I stepped out through the gate.

No. Not yet. I won't be free until I'm in the bus, until the bus
starts moving.

I hurried to the last seat in the bus, pressing myself into a corner.
The bus began to move.

Not yet. Not yet. Not until the gate is out of sight. Not until the
wall is out of sight. Not until the last guard post disappears.

The bus turned and a solid line of trees wiped Dannemora out
of sight.

The trees were so close I could smell them and the road began
singing to me.